TOP STORY: LOUIS FARRAKHAN'S NEW POPULARITY

April 17 - 30, 1995

In THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

The Alonzo Awards

Forget the Pulitzers... *In These Times* proudly salutes Cokie Roberts, Brit Hume and other superstars of journalistic cynicism. Miles Harvey reports



Also, Toward a more democratic media, by Jim Naureckas



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EDITORIAL

CORPORATE WELFARE AND COUNTERINSURGENCY

Why, in a time of frantic budget-cutting, is a corrupt, incompetent federal agency's $29 billion allocation sacrosanct? You might think a federal program's immunity from budget cuts would be granted only as a reward for excellence, or for contributions to the democratic functioning of our nation. But, in the case of the CIA and related intelligence services, you'd be mistaken. No matter how you look at it, the CIA and its cohorts fail the test of service to democracy. Indeed, they fail in every way imaginable. (See "Company Men," page 26.)

Consider the CIA's competence as an intelligence agency. The CIA's main job during the Cold War was to estimate the strength and internal developments of our primary opponent, the Soviet Union. Yet the agency consistently overestimated Soviet industrial growth, military proficiency and political stability. And it failed completely to see the meaning of glasnost and perestroika, which led to the peaceful dismantling of communism.

The recent disclosure of CIA ties to Guatemalan assassins lifts the cover on its pattern of support for anti-democratic forces throughout the Third World.

Instead of providing the government with information to guide the president and Congress during these years, the CIA provided misinformation designed to foster a policy of aggressive confrontation and military buildup. This served the purpose of our most shortsighted and pro-military government leaders, but betrayed the interests of democracy and the American people.

Meanwhile, protected by an old-boy network of bureaucrats who looked the other way, Aldrich Ames brazenly and sloppily enriched himself by selling names of agents and secret reports to the Soviets. He probably would still be doing so if the FBI had not been called in to investigate the steady disappearance of American agents in Russia.

Incompetence, however, is the benign side of the CIA's troubles. As an intelligence agency, the CIA has probably been no less efficient and no more corrupt than its main rivals, the KGB and Britain's MI5.

The agency's truly loathsome activity has been in the realm of counterinsurgency, an assignment that routinely requires illegality. It involves planning and carrying out assassinations of political leaders of both friendly and unfriendly countries, the creation of armies that murder the people of states with whom we have supposedly normal diplomatic relations, and assorted acts of sabotage.

The Kennedy administration gave this kind of activity its first official sanction when it established the forerunners of today's School of the Americas, where Latin American military men are trained in counterinsurgency. These "police academies," as Kennedy called them, were designed, he said, to "increase the intimacy between our armed forces and the military of Latin America," and to teach our friends "how to control mobs and fight guerrillas."

Kennedy formalized the murderous connection between the CIA and the Latin American military, but President Eisenhower, in 1954, had already established the paradigm when he ordered the CIA to overthrow Col. Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, the elected president of Guatemala. Arbenz had had the effrontery to nationalize United Fruit Company land without compensating the company and then, facing hostility from the United States, to buy arms from Czechoslovakia. Eisenhower seized on this to paint Guatemala as the dominant Latin American military force and to accuse Arbenz of extending "Communist colonialism to this hemisphere."

With this rationale in place, the CIA organized an invasion. An exiled Guatemalan army officer, Carlos Castillo Armas, recruited a ragtag army and—armed and directed by the CIA—invaded from Honduras. Within two weeks they defeated the allegedly powerful "Communist" force and, under CIA supervision, set up the military regime that is still terrorizing the country.

In the 40-odd years since this occurred, the Guatemalan army, which includes many U.S.-trained officers, has slaughtered more than 150,000 Guatemalans, most of them Mayan Indians attempting to hold onto their ancestral land. This army, like those throughout Central America, has been supported over the years with hundreds of million of dollars provided by U.S. taxpayers. Even now, despite all the army's acknowledged human rights violations, U.S. offi-

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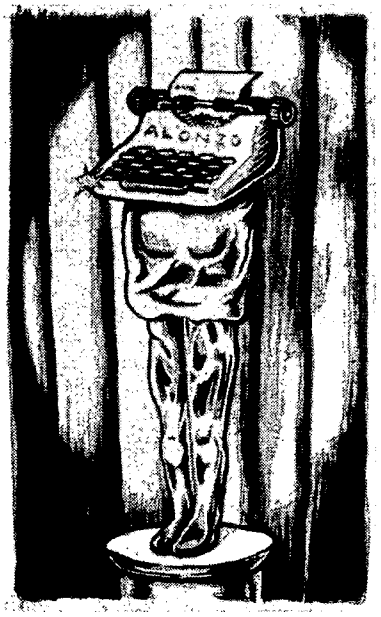
(ISSN 0160-5992)

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This issue (Vol. 19, No. 11) published April 17, 1995 for newsstand sales April 17 - 30, 1995

In THESE TIMES

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LETTERS

Beyond the status quo

I was delighted to finally see coverage of Puerto Rico in *In These Times* (March 20). Unfortunately, I have some qualms about James Cohen's article. Someone said sometime ago that imperialism was the Achilles' heel of liberals. I never expected this to be true for a progressive publication.

Puerto Rico is a colonial possession of the United States. One can debate the character of that colonialism but it remains that Puerto Ricans do not enjoy democracy under the aegis of the United States. To say, as Cohen does, that it is about time that Puerto Ricans stop struggling to achieve self-determination and focus on social issues is really disingenuous. Most of Puerto Rico's "social issues" are linked to the lack of power that Puerto Ricans have in defining solutions to the crisis the island is experiencing today.

I was particularly disappointed that Cohen failed to note what was truly significant in the defeat of last November's anti-crime ballot initiatives. Cohen claimed that this vote marked the first time that Puerto Ricans had considered ballot initiatives that had nothing to do with the debate about the island's status. In fact, there have been other referendums unrelated to the status debate—for example, one that gave the vote to 18-year-old Puerto Ricans.

What was important about the most recent vote was that a social movement outside of traditional political parties led to the defeat of reactionary efforts to curtail civil liberties. This movement included labor unions, civic and religious groups, parties of the left, and former members of the island's supreme court; in summary, the broadest coalition assembled in the island's recent history.

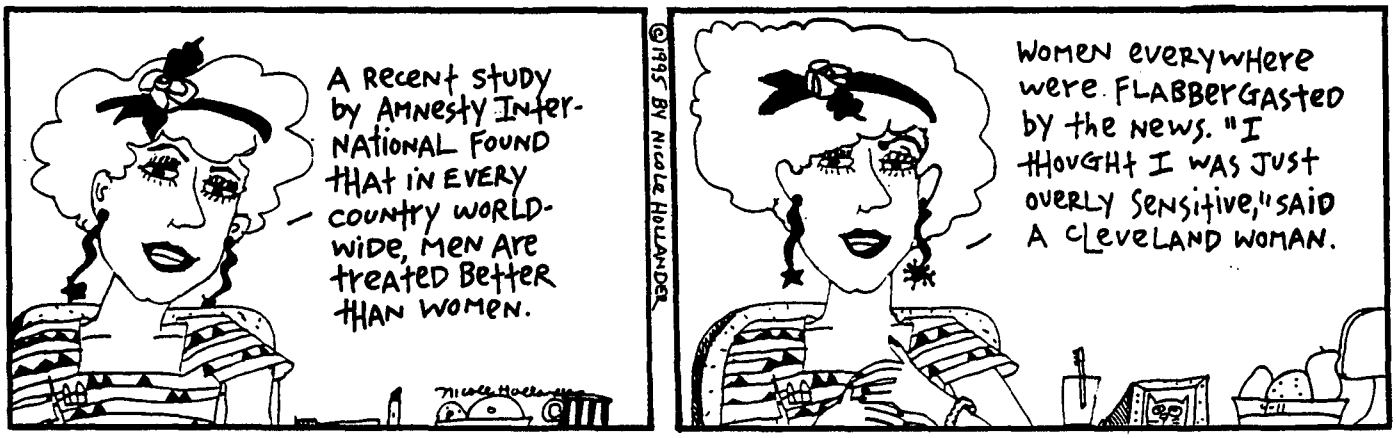
Until Puerto Ricans gain a voice in the fundamental decisions that affect their lives, their debates—quite rightly—will not be about monetary policy and international trade agreements, but rather about the political rights and strategies necessary to achieve the goal of self-determination and liberty.

Victor M. Rodriguez
Irvine, Calif.

James Cohen replies: I certainly did not mean to imply that Puerto Ricans should "stop struggling to achieve self-determination," nor would I ever use such a formula. I agree completely with Rodriguez that social issues are intimately linked to the lack of power Puerto Ricans have in defining solutions to the crisis. But the fact is that the status issue doesn't come onto the political agenda very often in a serious way. In the meantime, poverty is destroying the fabric of society. Raising immediate social issues is important. Seeking concrete solutions could possibly lead to recasting the status question in much more concrete terms than has been previously done.

Is Puerto Rico a democracy? We are talking about a parliamentary regime that was created under conditions of colonial domination, and which in a real way masks that domination. But the image of a mask is not completely adequate. Puerto Ricans fervently believe in their electoral system—and their levels of participation put the United States to shame. No

SYLVIA — by Nicole Hollander



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strategy to achieve self-determination can forget that.

The coalition that defeated November's ballot initiatives did involve a broad array of groups, but their response to Gov. Rosello's agenda was very defensive and ad hoc. When these same groups begin—someday, I hope—to develop an agenda of their own, then we can talk about a social movement.

In regards to the referendum on the voting age, Rodriguez has caught me in a factual error. My humblest apologies.

Finally, I'll steer clear of polemical fireworks. The label "liberal" doesn't fit me well, and as for imperialism, let me just say that it works in strange ways. Like it or not, status politics as they have been practiced in Puerto Rico have often been counterproductive. I could refer you to dozens of my pro-independence friends in Puerto Rico who would agree.

No need to invade

The sophisticated historical evidence Gar Alperovitz (*ITT*, February 20) provides showing that atom bombs were not necessary to defeat Japan is quite convincing. But more basic and overwhelming proofs of this fact were known to every GI throughout the Pacific during the war's final months. Japan was prostrate, totally vulnerable to bombing of every inch of its territory.

Not one drop of oil nor one ounce of food was entering the country, and Japan's navy and air force were totally useless. There was absolutely no rush to invade, and common sense dictated that we announce a protracted bombing campaign of the major targets of Japan until they surrendered, warning of each mass bombing raid in *advance*, so that innocent women, children and aged could be evacuated.

Japan was already *trying* to surrender, and only the Russians were hoping for delay so they could gain influence at the last minute. Nevertheless, supposed military "experts" were estimating casualties in an invasion of the home islands at 1 million based on fierce Iwo Jima/Okinawa hand-to-hand defenses. Our military experts failed us, as did our State Department and political leadership, when they dwelled solely on "invasion casualties." As kid GIs at the time, we kept asking ourselves: "Why do we have to invade? Why don't we just bomb them until they surrender?" There is a belated lesson to be learned.

John Tomasin
West New York, N.J.

Backing Lasch

In response to Christopher Phelps' article on Christopher Lasch (*ITT*, March 20), let me comment that Lasch's writings of the '70s were very important to me as both a graduate student in social science and then as a beginning professor.

Lasch had a wonderful ability to identify and describe the social problems besetting the United States. That his solutions to the loss of meaningful communities, the breakdown of enduring families and relationships, and the relegating of most discussions to bottom-line considerations were not magically satisfying to all indicates only that he was not perfect (and that the problems and their solutions were—and are—very complex).

As a democratic socialist, I continue to urge my students to learn from the vigorous criticism of Lasch. If, at the end, he upheld the work of those advancing "petty-bourgeois virtue," perhaps this was because he believed that this is what he had been doing for all those years.

I believe the answers needed for America will be found in the socialism of Marx *and* in the virtues of community, family and equality advanced by Lasch.

Bob Miller
Reading, Pa.

Aid to Israel

The most disturbing book in many years was recently published. I refer to *The Other Side of Deception* by Victor Ostrovsky, a former colonel in the Israeli army, then a lieutenant-commander in the Israeli navy who was later enlisted by Mossad, Israel's famous intelligence agency. The book explains much about the Israeli attitudes noted in your March 6 editorial.

After four years in Mossad, Ostrovsky was forced out because of his liberal convictions: he believed it would be in Israel's best interests for the Palestinians to have their own state. His first book, *By Way of Deception* (1990), described the structure and methods of Mossad, and his new book reveals its agenda.

For Americans, the Mossad conspiracy to assassinate President Bush at the Madrid meeting in 1991 will prove the most shocking. This heinous act was to be blamed on the Palestinians, thus fueling hatred against the Palestinians by the American public. Through former Rep. Pete McCloskey, Jack Anderson was alerted, and his timely column averted fulfillment of the crime.

Such an audacious and disgraceful act against the country that sustains Israel seems unbelievable, but hold on. Ostrovsky describes in great detail the assassination of Uwe Barschel, the prime minister of the German state of Schleswig-Holstein. Barschel had learned of a secret illegal arms operation being carried out by Mossad in cooperation with elements of the BND (German Intelligence Agency), and was about to inform Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Mossad's top officer gave the order for the assassination.

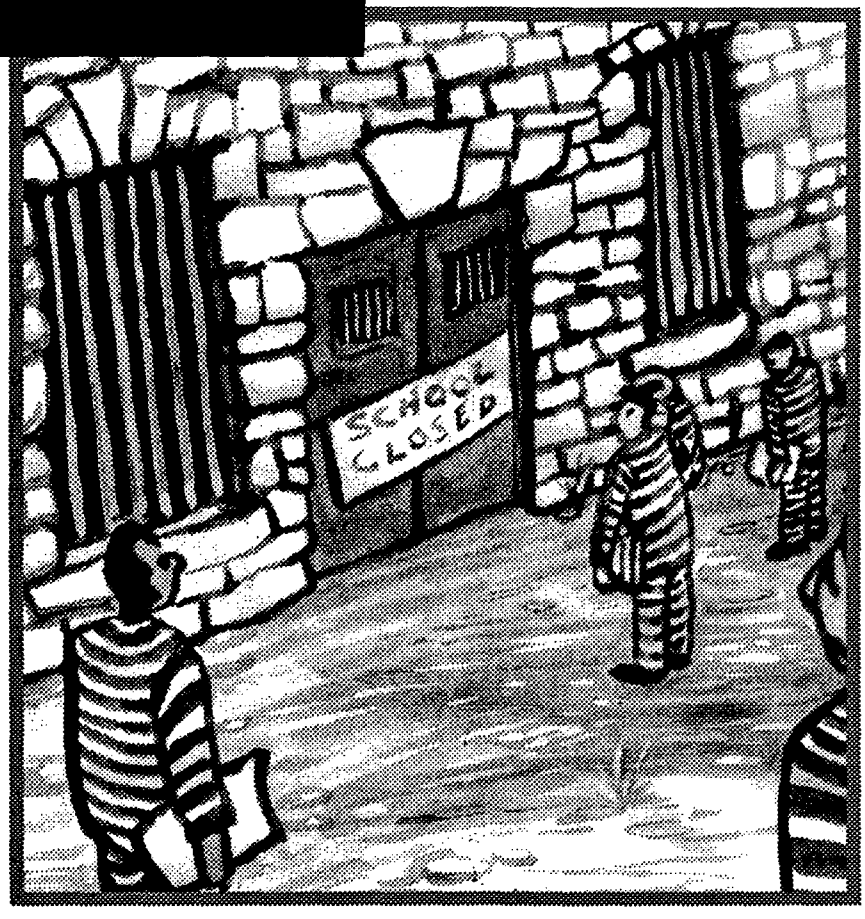
Let's have a congressional investigation of these charges. In the meantime, all foreign aid to Israel should be suspended.

Alan Rhodes
Willoughby, Ohio

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you wished to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

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InSHORT



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CELL BLOCK GRANTS

During his 11 years, four months and 17 days in Indiana prisons on a first-time, non-violent drug charge, Dayle Raymer engaged in an arduous struggle for intellectual and personal growth. By the time Raymer left prison last December he had earned both a bachelor's degree in speech communication and an invitation to begin work on his master's degree at Ball State University. Raymer characterizes his college-in-prison experience as a "life-saving opportunity that taught me that I owed it to myself, my family and my friends to contribute to the community in a positive way."

Unfortunately, Raymer's still-incarcerated classmates may lose the opportunity to expand their horizons the way he did: Both the original $30.2 billion Omnibus Crime Bill (signed into law by President Clinton last September 13) and the Republican-dominated House's new version of the bill (passed



Diversity University

Federal tax dollars—some 3 million of them—subsidized a decade-long "diversity awareness" training program at the Department of Transportation that allegedly encouraged blacks and whites to hurl verbal abuse at one another and led one employee to be hospitalized for depression, the *New York Times* reports. According to Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA), a member of the House transportation subcommittee that investigated the program, the training sessions (led by a follower of a Pacific Northwest guru who claims to "channel" an ancient spirit named Ramtha) included participants "being physically tied to co-workers for hours, and being required to strip down to their underwear in front of co-workers and reveal deep-seated problems."



In the end

London's East End recently buried one of its own—the notorious gangster Ronnie Kray, one of the legendary Kray Brothers who ruled the London underworld in the '60s with an unabashed cruelty. But many East Enders saw the Krays as heroes, hard-working blokes who had made good against impossible odds. *According to a*

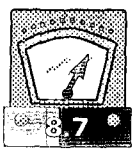
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report in the London *Independent*, Ronnie went out in style, with a massive funeral that drew thousands. There were some 39 limousines in the procession, "half a dozen ... reserved for wreaths alone." Beneath his rough exterior, Ronnie was apparently a sensitive soul. The leading actor in the musical Starlight Express revealed that Ronnie, a fan, had sent him four poems from prison, including a tender ode to his mother. "Mum you are like a rose," the poem began, "When God picked you, you were the best mum he could have chose."

Captive audience

A bill banning television from maximum security prisons recently sailed through the Oklahoma state legislature, the *Daily Oklahoman* reports. State Rep. Wayne Cozort isn't worried that the ban might increase prison discontent. "If they riot, then shoot a few," the Tulsa Republican announced. "I'm sick of prisoners controlling the whole agenda." Cozort then suggested that the best way to handle prisoners would be simply to "turn them loose," into the hands of an armed Oklahoman citizenry, who could perhaps "shoot a few" themselves.



APPALL-O-METER SCALE
1. Models Inc.-redible!
2. Infomercial irritating
3. Plausibly deniable
4. L.A.P.D. blue
5. Bob Dole-icious
6. Raoul Cédras-tic
7. Ollie North nasty
8. Holiday In Rwanda
9. Zhirinovskyesque
10. Where have you gone, Joe Goebbels?

February 4) prohibit prisoner access to Pell Grants.

Conservative pundits claim that eliminating Pell Grants sends a strong signal to society that prisoners do not get preferential treatment over law-abiding citizens. What's more, they argue, prisoner access to Pell Grants is an unacceptable drain on public education funds.

Yet prisoners are hardly a major financial drain on the Pell Grant budget. Of last year's 4 million Pell Grants, totaling $6.4 billion, 27,700 prisoners received grants worth approximately $41 million—considerably less than 1 percent of the total. And prisoners don't get preferential treatment: they are eligible for the grants not because they are prisoners but because they are poor. Prisoners do not take money out of the pockets of needy students outside of jail.

The most important reason to maintain prisoner access to Pell Grants is the impact the entitlements have on recidivism. Bureau of Justice Statistics figures from 1987 show that prisoners with post-secondary education recidivate at a rate between 30 and 31 percent—approximately one-half the rate for prisoners who do not participate in college programs.

Pell Grants, costing an average of $2,300 per year per recipient, are a wise investment compared to the $25,000-$33,000 per year that it costs to house the typical inmate. In addition to reducing the likelihood of repeat offenders, college-in-prison programs save taxpayers' money.

The National Council on Crime and Delinquency estimates that over the next 10 years, federal and state expenditures to build and operate new prisons will reach $351 billion. There is no reason to believe that this massive outlay of money will reduce crime. Post-secondary education for prisoners, on the other hand, has a proven record of reducing recidivism and costs a comparatively small $41 million per year.

—Stephen Hartnett

(Research assistance for this story was provided by David Tyler Rice and Douglas "T" Thompkins.)

A CUT BELOW

New York state has the least equitable income distribution of any state except Louisiana. As a result of tax and spending cuts proposed by New York Gov. George Pataki and New York City Mayor Rudolph Guiliani, though, New York may finally acquire the dubious honor of surpassing its Southern rival.

The proposals threaten to decimate the state's public sector and replace the current welfare system with workfare programs that could eliminate a significant portion of unionized government jobs. Pataki has coupled his tax-cutting declaration with a promise to eliminate 11,000 workers from the government payroll. Giuliani, for his part, has announced that he has been forced to cut city welfare spending by 23 percent.

Under Pataki's plan, which will take $6.8 billion a year out of state coffers by 1998 and lower the top tax rate from 7.9 percent to 5.9 percent—wealthy taxpayers could save several thousand dollars a year. Those on the lower end of the scale might save only $100 or so—a figure easily offset by, say, the likely increase in the cost of riding the city subway system

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that will result from the expected reduction in the transit authority budget.

For those who do not earn anything—AFDC recipients, the chronically disabled, the homeless—the effect of the Pataki-Giuliani squeeze will be catastrophic. Funds for monitoring children judged to be at risk of abuse will be cut in half. Nearly a third of the state money allocated to the city and state university systems is to be cut.

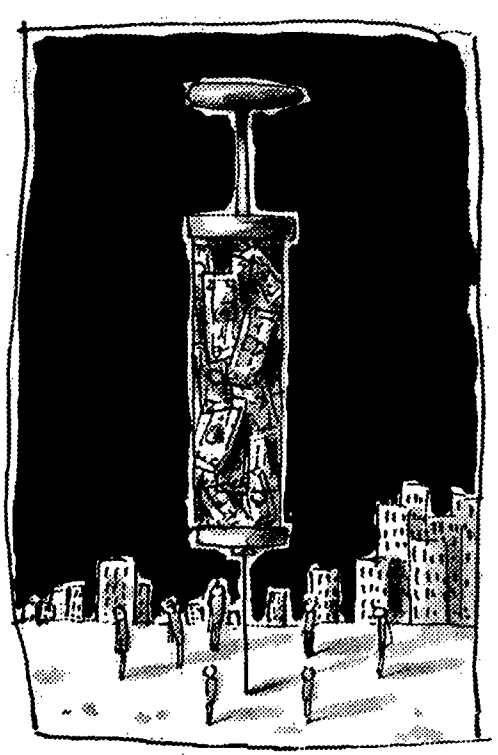
Further, the workfare programs are designed to undercut public sector union jobs. Workfare enrollees can now be seen tidying up some of the city's parks, cleaning police department buildings and doing basic clerical work in the social services—jobs previously the exclusive preserve of salaried union members. According to Stanley Hill, president of Association of Federal, State, County and Municipal Employees District Council 37, "We have had no commitment from the city that they're going to create jobs without replacing our members."

By the end of the century, Pataki hopes to place half of those on welfare in workfare programs—which promise only dead-end jobs and offer no real job training. What workfare *will* offer is a way for Pataki and Giuliani to cut taxes at the expense of paid public sector employment.

—**Sasha Abramsky**

STICKING POINTS

For more than a year, government documents that demonstrate the effectiveness of needle exchange programs in reducing HIV infection among drug users have been gathering dust in the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS). (See *ITT*, January 9.) The PHS has been sitting on the documents—which favorably review a massive needle-exchange study funded by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—because no federal agency wants to be the first to say that it's good public health policy to distribute clean needles among drug users.



But the PHS' strategy was stymied by the Washington-based Drug Policy Foundation, which obtained copies of the review documents and released them to the public on March 7. The CDC review endorses the study's recommendation to lift the federal ban on funding for needle-exchange programs—and to get state governments to consider repealing laws that prevent drug users from obtaining clean needles.

PHS spokesperson Rayford Kytle claims that the sticking point in going

MEDIA BEAT

By Pat Aufderheide

Newt morality

The fence separating the business and editorial sides of mass media has always been higher in theory than in fact. But now House Speaker Newt Gingrich says he not only wants the fence lowered, he wants it cut down completely. "The business side of the broadcast industry ought to educate the editorial writing side of the broadcast industry," Gingrich told *Broadcasting and Cable* magazine. "I mean, I went into a major cable company that owns a daily newspaper, and the newspaper's editorial page is attacking the very position of the cable company." He called that "dumb" and "irresponsible." Some might have called it courageous.

Rules to grow by

After much bluster, Senate Commerce Committee chairman Larry Pressler (R-SD) has finally introduced telecommunications reform legislation—and the bill has provoked widespread disgruntlement. Big-time players were angry that the legislation didn't offer them enough perks, while public interest types denounced it as a corporate giveaway.

In the watered-down bill that emerged from a markup session—altered to appease Democrats—radio owners won no deregulatory favors. And television station owners might actually have to pay a fee if they use the extra broadcasting bandwidths—or spectrum—that may be assigned to them by the Federal Communications Commission in

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order to transmit non-broadcast information such as business data. Basic cable-price regulation would also stay for a while. Some big-money lobbyists are muttering that the bill is sloppy and Pressler is inept.

So why are public interest and consumer groups, including the Media Access Project, People for the American Way and the Consumer Federation of America, slamming the bill? For one, it says nothing about giving nonprofit groups low-cost access to the coming "information superhighway."

For another, the bill would permit cable and telephone companies to merge. Instead of a cable and telephone company in your town, you could end up with a single cable and phone provider. And there's more: the bill would let cable companies buy broadcast stations.

Perhaps the most ominous development is the last-minute attachment of an amendment that would ban any "obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, or indecent" remark—private or public—over any "telecommunications device."

A version of the already-infamous bill proposed by Sen. James Exon (D-NE), the amendment would turn government regulators into thought police of, among other things, all Internet traffic. Although it would probably be found unconstitutional even by today's courts, many public interest advocates want to block it now and save years of court battles. Unfortunately, said Center for Democracy and Technology's Danny Weitzner, "it's hard for legislators to vote for indecency."

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public with the review's recommendations is that Congress requires that needle exchanges be proven effective in reducing both HIV infection and drug use before it lifts the funding ban. And while the CDC review concludes that needle exchanges do not increase drug use, Kytle says the review fails to show that the programs reduce drug use.

Yet not all federal legislation concerning needle exchanges says the programs must reduce drug use in order to qualify for funding. A 1993 bill appropriating money for the Department of Health and Human Services merely requires that needle exchanges reduce HIV infection rates in order to receive federal funding.

But the PHS' Kytle offers a second line of defense for the agency's inaction. He says there is too little solid research on the effectiveness of needle exchanges to furnish the "ammunition" necessary to fight the ban on federal funding. Kytle claims that the only study showing the benefits of needle exchanges to be published in a peer-reviewed medical journal is the massive CDC-funded study, which was headed by Dr. Peter Lurie of the University of California, San Francisco.

Here, too, the PHS is grasping at straws. Numerous articles showing the public health benefits of needle exchanges have appeared in peer-reviewed journals, including the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and the *New England Journal of Medicine.*

So why do the federal authorities in charge of public health resort to sloppy research to avoid the truth about needle exchanges? "The three leading reasons they can't lift the ban are politics, politics, and politics," says Lurie.

—Shawn Neidorf

Tomorrow's News Tonight **By Steve Brodner**



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HOUSEBOUND?

Alice Palmer gears up

Illinois State Sen. Alice Palmer says she never considered a life in politics until it came looking for her. Late one night in 1988, a group of friends from Palmer's South Side Chicago neighborhood came to persuade her husband, Ed "Buzz" Palmer, to run for 7th Ward committeeman, a significant office in Chicago politics. When Buzz, a longtime community activist, said he couldn't do it, they turned to Alice. She had just finished filling in as Citizen Action's national director of voter education, teaching the basics of running grass-roots campaigns. So Palmer launched a successful campaign of her own—out of her basement—with an all-volunteer staff.

After four years as ward committeewoman, Palmer was appointed in 1991 to the Illinois State Senate to fill a seat left vacant when the incumbent fell ill. In 1992, she ran unopposed for her first full term. Now she is considering a run in 1996 for the U.S. House of Representatives from Illinois' 2nd Congressional District. Palmer is widely seen as the strongest challenger lining up to face Democrat Mel Reynolds, the current congressman, who is facing charges that he had sex with two minors.

Palmer says little about the allegations against Reynolds, and instead keeps focused on issues. She opposed his vote for NAFTA, although she characterizes herself as a free-trade advocate. Economic development and security and

ETC.

By Dave Mulcahey

Earth Day Inc.

Organizers of Earth Day events around the country are a little irritated that the press they are getting is so negative. Perhaps they should be glad it hasn't been any worse.

One of the first press targets was an organization called Earth Day USA, a nonprofit set up by Bruce Anderson, a New Hampshire environmentalist, and Gaylord Nelson, the former senator from Wisconsin who started the whole thing 25 years ago. From the start, many of the environmental activists whom Anderson recruited to staff his organization had misgivings about his competence to organize the event. But more disquieting to some was his and Nelson's obliging attitude toward corporate sponsorship, to the point of neglecting to screen out companies with poor environmental records.

The Earth Day USA project hit the skids last summer when John Stauber, editor of *PR Watch*, revealed that Allen Finch, an executive at the public relations firm Dorf & Stanton, had been bragging to *O'Dwyers PR Services* that Earth Day USA had hired his firm to, in effect, run Earth Day. Shortly thereafter, nearly half the organization's board of directors resigned. (Interestingly, the current *O'Dwyers* details Finch's efforts on behalf of the livestock industry.)

With Earth Day USA's reputation irreparably tarnished, Anderson and Nelson formed a new group, Earth Day XXV. In that guise they collaborated with Earthlink, a partnership between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the private Academy

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for Educational Development, to stage a national "Town Hall Video Conference" on April 18.

At the end of March, journalists Jack Anderson and Michael Binstein revealed this project to be yet another "greenwashing" free-for-all. In their *Washington Post* column Anderson and Binstein reported that Project Earthlink was sending solicitations to prospective sponsors promising everything from executive access to "White House discussions" to "corporate name/logo recognition" on the conference's merchandise—all for a modest fee of $100,000. When queried about the solicitation, the White House denied any involvement and noted that its Earth Day commitments had yet to be scheduled.

If corporations and government agencies have tried to co-opt Earth Day, some environmental groups have recognized the need to control its growth. The organizers of the successful Earth Day '90—which raised $3 million—reportedly made a deal with the country's major environmental groups to disband as soon as the event was over, since the national groups feared that an annual Earth Day event might represent yet another drain on already scarce fundraising dollars.

Some wonder if, in light of the growing impotence of mainstream environmentalism, Earth Day events ought to be more confrontational than celebratory. "The reality is that the environmental movement is facing its biggest defeat in 25 years," says John Stauber of *PR Watch*. "Rather than using Earth Day as an opportunity to face reality, they will be putting up a false front of unity. This is really a missed opportunity."

family concerns are Palmer's key issues. In the Illinois Senate she serves as minority spokesperson on the revenue committee and has co-sponsored legislation to provide better wages and working conditions for home health care workers, a large number of whom live in her district.

Although Palmer has not formally declared her candidacy, her "pre-campaign" is moving full steam ahead with the formation of a 50-member support committee, the hiring of a media consultant and staff, and a press packet that refers to her as a "candidate."

Palmer has a broad following in her senate district, where she has lived for the past 23 years. Despite the district's alarming decline in industrial employment, Palmer says she finds "resiliency, spirit and creative force" in her community. It was here that she and her husband hosted the first fundraiser for the 1983 campaign of Harold Washington, Chicago's first African-American mayor.

Palmer, 55, grew up in Indianapolis. As a result of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, she was able to attend an integrated city high school that had resources today's urban students can only dream about: an art gallery, a greenhouse and a daily newspaper. She attended college at Indiana University and earned a master's degree in urban studies from Roosevelt University in Chicago. She completed her Ph.D. in educational administration at Northwestern University, where she served as associate dean and director of African-American student affairs. Palmer made educational reform her cause long before it became a hot political issue. She co-authored an adult literacy book and was the founding executive director of Chicago Cities in Schools, part of a national federation of dropout intervention organizations. And she still sits on the advisory committee of the Algebra Project, the innovative youth education program founded by veteran civil-rights organizer Robert Moses.

Despite the long list of boards, committees and organizations that Palmer has served on, and despite the grueling campaign schedule she's maintaining, she seems remarkably serene. Friends frequently describe her as even-tempered. The characterization prompts Palmer to laugh: "I have my moments—I use my passion pointedly."

Echoing Martin Luther King Jr., Palmer argues that America faces a crucial choice "between community or chaos." In the face of the brutal cuts proposed by the Republicans, Palmer believes we need to seek guidance in the successful social welfare experience of progressive European governments. Later this month, Palmer will co-sponsor a "People's Congress on Family and the Economy," where she hopes cross-disciplinary conversation can help rejuvenate the country's commitment to social activism.

Palmer understands the sense of loss people feel for the world she remembers from her childhood, when no one locked their doors and child-raising was a community effort.

Building a broad idea of community is vital in the 2nd District, which covers much of the South Side. It's a predominantly African-American district, but also includes high-income white communities in the city's south suburbs.

Palmer's unofficial campaign in the district, like much of the rest of her life, can take an exhausting toll. But she is always prepared to "call upon reserves," she says. Squaring her shoulders, she looks around her office for a map, and sets off for church, the next step on what promises to be a long Sunday.

—Susan Kimmelman

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THE FIRST STONE

YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR

By Joel Bleifuss

Last October, Newt Gingrich, the man who would be Speaker of the House, told a private gathering of special-interest lobbyists that they could count on "future corporate savings" if they invested their campaign dollars in Republican congressional candidates. With GOP representatives chairing committees that regulate the environment, Gingrich promised, the new Congress would be much more friendly to big business.

That promise is now being fulfilled. One of the more egregious examples of this cordial relationship was on display recently in the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, which drafted a bill that would systematically gut the current Clean Water Act. Rep. Bud Schuster (R-PA), the committee chairman, excluded Democrats from the debate over the bill and invited industry lobbyists to closed meetings at which clean water legislation was rewritten.

The Republicans, aided by officials from the Chemical Manufacturers Association and the Chlorine Chemistry Council, rewrote laws regulating the discharge of industrial waste water into municipal sewers. Currently, such waste must be treated to remove toxic contaminants. But the new regulations would allow industry to dump its liquid wastes directly into sewers without having to remove toxins like chlorinated compounds and heavy metals—the same poisons that environmental scientists fear are disrupting the endocrine system that regulates human growth, reproduction and immunity to disease.

Democratic committee members Robert Borski of Pennsylvania and Norman Mineta of California responded to this maneuver by sending Schuster a stinging letter of protest. "Unlike other years," they wrote, "when the Committee has been open to all points of view, this year's process has been limited almost exclusively to the regulated business community." Mineta elaborated on this at a March 22 press conference, where he inveighed against corporate interests that "have created the most polluter-friendly legislation to be considered by the Congress in a quarter of a century."

"The bill is very simply a polluter's bill of rights," said Mineta.

The corporate community realizes it has won—at least for the time being. Michael Kehs, who heads Burson-Marstellar Public Relations' worldwide environmental practice, is exultant at business prospects. In an interview with *O'Dwyers PR Services*, he put it this way: "Today the business community enjoys the upper hand. There is a new contract on the street. And although the word 'environment' is never mentioned, many observers believe it's less a contract with America than a 'contract on environmental busybodies.' "

Last fall, lobbyists from the Chemical Manufacturers Association and the Chlorine Chemistry Council discussed that "contract on environmental busybodies" at a workshop sponsored by the Chlorine Chemistry Council, an affiliate of the Chemical Manufacturers Association devoted to defending chlorine-based industrial processes. (See *In These Times*, March 20.) According to one workshop participant, industry executives "vilified the environmental movement" as they explored its strengths and weaknesses. The participant, an industry insider who asked to remain anonymous, said, "We were told that although environmentalists are on the run and limping, it's possible they 'will correct themselves and may eventually connect with the American people.' "

This is perhaps the only issue on which Lois Gibbs and the Chlorine Chemistry Council could agree. Gibbs is the executive director of Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste, a network of more than 7,000 local organizations working to halt toxic pollution in their communities. (See *In These Times*, March 21, 1994.) She thinks the environmental movement is in deep trouble.

Gibbs has few friends among mainstream environmental leaders. She is not invited to participate in meetings of the Green Group, the 24 or so environmental groups that are often—and oddly—referred to as the "Big 10."

"We aren't players, we won't play by their rules," says Gibbs. "We tell our folks what the national groups are up to, and we lobby the national groups as if they were politicians. That makes them really angry. They know that we won't agree with their position nine out of 10 times because their position is always compromise. And because we won't agree with them, they view us as a problem instead of as an asset."

"One leader of a national group confronted me and said he was tired of us 'airing dirty laundry.' And I said, 'Dirty laundry is about who you are sleeping with, it is not about a

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public position on a bill. The problem is, you people don't understand the difference between the two.' "

Environmental journalist Mark Dowie views Gibbs as a "national heroine." Dowie is the author of *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century* (MIT Press, 1995), a deft examination of the institutional failure of the environmental movement. Says Dowie, "One thing about the environmental movement ... is that it is very polite. It is run by gentlemen. And Lois Gibbs can be rude, and downright confrontational."

"The environmental lobby is the most impressive lobby in Washington in terms of gathering the facts and presenting the facts in a persuasive way to the right people," says Dowie. "The problem is that facts don't count in Washington. What counts is money and votes. And you can't have a powerful lobby without substantial grass-roots support.

"The people who support the national environmental movement are not active environmentalists, they are really only passive check writers, unlike the [conservative] Wise Use people. And if you look closely at the voting patterns, you see that while a large number of people consider the environment an important issue, not a large number of people actually vote on environmental issues. So what you have is this wonderful lobby, but they are not delivering what Congress really wants."

Dowie believes the national groups could play a more dynamic role "if they went out and built the grass roots." He mentions, for example, that Friends of the Earth has only one office in the United States, which is in Washington. By contrast, the group has 270 affiliated chapters in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, along with a whole separate organization in Scotland. In Germany, Friends of the Earth is organized into 2,000 "activist groups" that can be mobilized very quickly.

One of the problems with national environmental organizations is that they have become ossified, established fixtures of the Beltway culture. These groups are not going to suddenly devolve and disperse large chunks of their staff and resources into the hinterlands in order to cultivate the grass roots. After all, there is a bit more glamour and glory to be had living in Washington and buttonholing famous politicians, than settling down in a state capital like, say, Jefferson City, Mo., in order to spend a career jawboning state legislators.

Part of the solution is for environmentalists to fund local environmental groups. "I advise people to split their environmental philanthropy," says Dowie, "and put no more than half of it into the nationals, and put the rest into local organizations. The NIMBY [Not In My Backyard] movement has far more potential than the mainstream organizations. There are about 10,000 to 15,000 such organizations, and they are networked."

According to Gibbs, "The strength of the environmental movement in the next 10 years is going to come from the states and the grass roots. The people at those levels are the ones who are going to get progressive laws passed. They are the ones who will change what is happening in D.C.

"The change in Congress happened last November because the other side organized from the bottom up. And while they were organizing from the bottom up, most of our environmentalists were putting their faith in national environmental groups to carry the message. But social change has always happened not by a corporate, top-heavy strategy—it comes through building educated and empowered consumers and citizens.

"Unfortunately, 'change' for the national environmental groups is to hire a few people of color, or to hire someone who travels around the country talking. But that is not the change we need from the Big 10 groups. We need them to really be responsive to the grass-roots movement." ◀

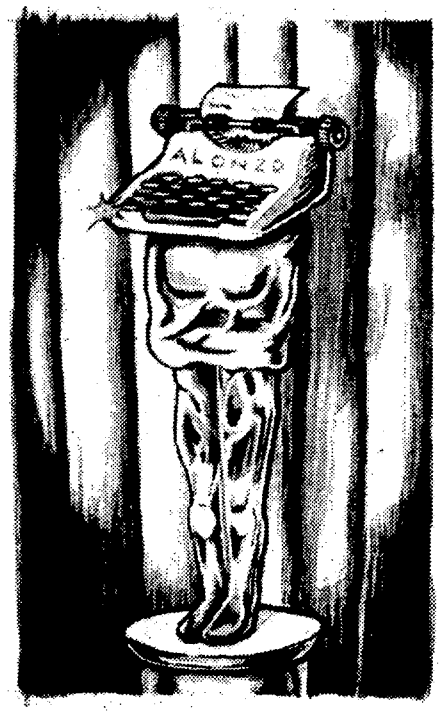
THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH by Peter Hannan



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MEDIA

The Alonzo Awards



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"Our Republic and its press will rise or fall together. ... A cynical, mercenary, demagogic, corrupt press will produce in time a people as base as itself."
—Joseph Pulitzer

Forget the Pulitzers... *In TheseTimes* proudly salutes Cokie Roberts, Brit Hume and other superstars of journalistic cynicism.

By Miles Harvey

The above words, carved into marble in the lobby of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, were written by a man who knew his subject intimately. If ever there lived a cynical, mercenary, demagogic and corrupt journalist, it was Joseph Pulitzer.

While building his 19th-century news empire, Pulitzer "routinely exaggerated the news, ran scare headlines, sharply slanted his political coverage and published fabricated news stories," writes J. Douglas Bates in *The Pulitzer Prize: The Inside Story of America's Most Prestigious Award*. "With equal culpability by rival William Randolph Hearst, Pulitzer helped incite the nation into the Spanish-American War. It killed almost 5,000 Americans and untold numbers of Spaniards and Cubans in 1898—all in the interest of selling more papers in a circulation war with Hearst."

With the riches he made from such schemes, Pulitzer was able to buy himself a dignified place in history. Upon his death in 1911, he left $1.5 million to found the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism and another $500,000 to endow the Pulitzer Prizes. These bequests not only gave Pulitzer what Bates calls "global immortality," but also changed the face of the news industry. By setting high ethical and professional standards for the world of journalism, the Pulitzer Prizes did much to correct the problems that their founder had been instrumental in creating.

Nonetheless, in recent decades the Pulitzers have been relegated to an increasingly marginal role in the world of corporate journalism. Last year, for example, the prestigious gold medal for public service—the Pulitzer Prize that went to the *Washington Post* for its groundbreaking Watergate coverage in 1973—was given to the *Akron Beacon Journal* for articles on racial attitudes. It was an important issue, to be sure, but it couldn't compete with the great events of the day: Nancy Kerrigan's bruised leg, John Wayne Bobbitt's severed penis and, of course, the fabled gash on O.J. Simpson's finger.

The Pulitzer public service award is no longer on the cutting edge of American journalism for one simple reason: the media has all but given up on the idea of serving the public. Civic duty, professional excellence, integrity, devotion to the truth—all the ideals celebrated by the Pulitzer Prize—are no longer the industry standards. Journalism is quickly reverting to the ethical anarchy of Joseph Pulitzer's day. The new codes of conduct are greed, self-promotion and, perhaps most notably, arrogance—the belief that journalists know best, that punditry equals reality, that reporters need not hold themselves to the same standards they demand of others.

In his new book, *The Bill*, former *Washington Monthly* editor Steven Waldman followed the development of one of the Clinton administration's major initiatives, the National

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Service Bill. Waldman was surprised to see how completely the media chose to ignore the legislation: During a year's time, not one reporter asked about it at any presidential press conference. "Cynicism ... not liberalism, is the dominant ideology of the Washington press corps," he concluded.

In this new ethos, the Pulitzer Prize—with its outdated notions about what Joseph Pulitzer called "an able, disinterested, public-spirited press"—cannot hope to serve as the industry's measurement for achievement. A new standard is required.

Thus, we (none too proudly) present the Alonzo Slayback Awards for Journalistic Cynicism. The "Alonzos" take their name from a man who, in 1882, walked into Pulitzer's *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* to complain about a story. He was promptly shot dead by the paper's editor—an apt metaphor for the contempt that many journalists today hold for their subjects, their audience and, worst of all, their craft.

The Alonzo for Public Disservice (co-winner): Cokie Roberts, ABC News and National Public Radio

An event that captures the very essence of the Alonzos occurred during the January 26, 1994, broadcast of *World News Tonight with Peter Jennings*. Reporter Cokie Roberts appeared on camera for what Jennings described as a live report from Capitol Hill. But Roberts was not on Capitol Hill. Apparently unbeknownst even to Jennings, she was standing in a studio in front of an electronic backdrop of the U.S. Capitol. To give the fake report just that little extra touch of reality, Roberts had put on an overcoat.

The network reprimanded Roberts and producer Rick Kaplan for the incident. But, as *Chicago Tribune* Washington bureau chief James Warren observed in a column, the fact that "the offending duo wasn't canned surely reflects big-time media's well-honed situational ethics; looking the other way when high-priced or well-known talent is in a fix. Guys in the mailroom get bounced for less."



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Calling Cokie Roberts a "well-known talent" is a big understatement. She's the ultimate Washington insider: both of her parents were members of Congress; her brother is a lobbyist; her husband, Steven V. Roberts, is a fellow member of the talk-show mediacracy. She speaks of former House Minority Leader Bob Michel as "a very dear friend," and of the late House Speaker Tip O'Neill as "our dear, dear love." You might think that all these entanglements would make her extremely cautious about potential conflicts of interest. You would be wrong.

Like many big-name TV journalists, Roberts has a thriving side business as a speaker-for-hire—a gig that reportedly brings her up to $20,000 per pop. And she doesn't mind playing the role of corporate

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courtier. In the midst of last year's heath care debate, for example, she gave a speech to the Group Health Association of America, an organization with a strong interest in the outcome of the reform effort. "Taking money from such a group shouldn't be a close call for someone covering Congress' biggest issue of the year," wrote the *Tribune*'s Warren.

ABC eventually cracked down on these speeches, but by that time Roberts' ethical gaffes had become so commonplace that Warren was including a regular "Cokie Watch" section in his weekly column. He explains that "'Cokie Watch' became a catch phrase for an unseemly brand of journalism practiced at the top of the media pecking order. [Roberts] personifies a lot about Washington journalism that is rather unfortunate."

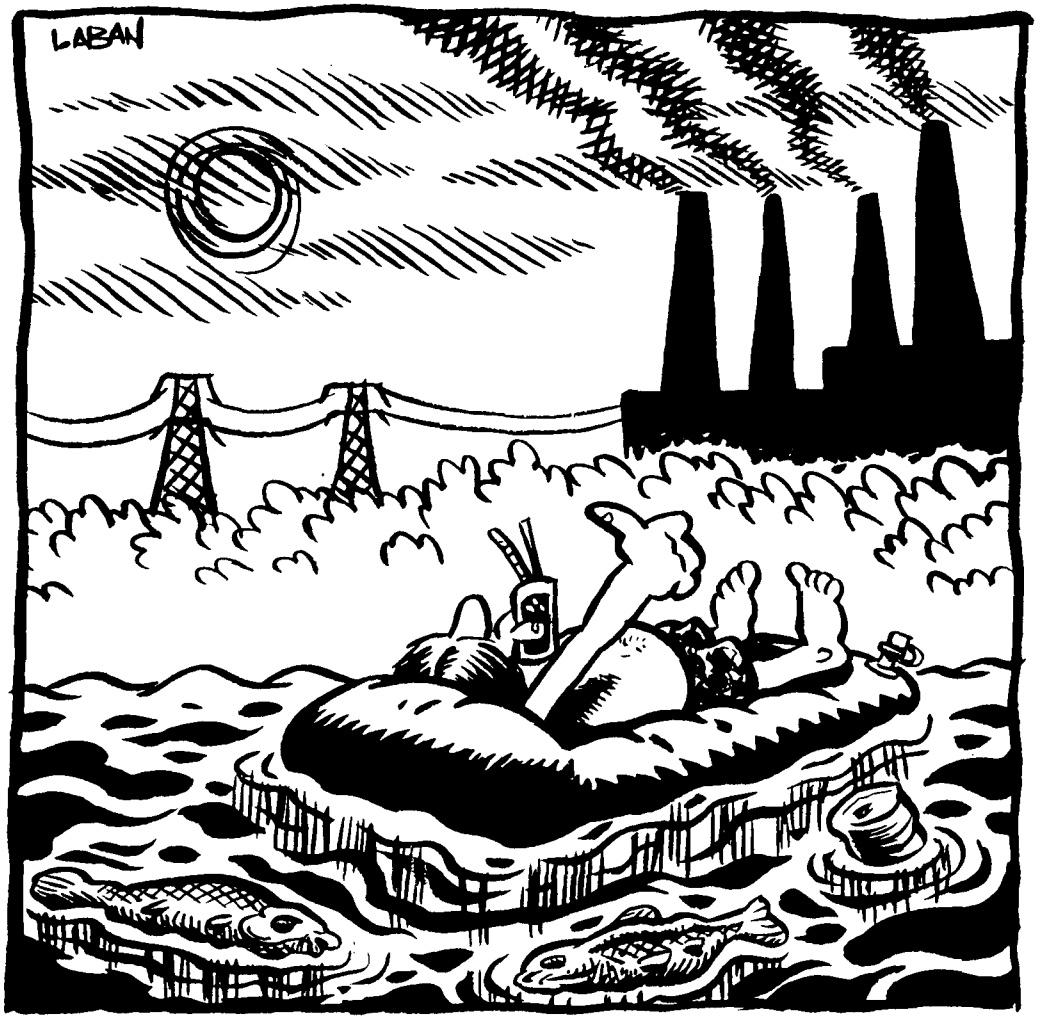
The Alonzo for Public Disservice (co-winner): Keith Schneider, *The New York Times*

"The St. Lawrence River is clearer than it has been in years," proclaimed *New York Times* national correspondent Keith Schneider in a June 6, 1994, dispatch from an Indian reservation in upstate New York. "Unsightly sores caused by chemicals have all but disappeared from the bellies and backs of catfish and bass taken from the river. ... [T]he costliest and most expensive toxic waste cleanup undertaken in the United States by private companies is beginning."

Yet there was a fundamental problem with what Schneider described as "one of the rare success stories in clearing a region of nasty wastes." The nasty wastes hadn't been cleared—at least not from the river. In fact, nearly a year after Schneider wrote the story, efforts to dredge toxic polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from the St. Lawrence are still on hold.

"The water does seem clearer because of the zebra mussels [a species that filters particulates from the water as it feeds]," says Kenneth L. Jock, Environment Division Director for the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe. "But it's not cleaner as far as contaminants." Despite cleanup efforts at two nearby aluminum plant sites, explains Jock, "all of the measurements we've done say that this is the most contaminated area in the St. Lawrence/Great Lakes system."

Schneider had been given a tour of the river by a local resident that he described as "a Mohawk fisherman and environmental researcher." (As to the latter title, Jock says the man "used to help us collect fish.") Schneider's guide had an obvious financial interest in demonstrating that the river had been cleaned up, observes Jock. Moreover, he "is a fisherman and goes by what he sees with his eyes. But PCBs are colorless and odorless."



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Like many environmental scientists, Jock was frustrated by his encounter with Schneider. "The reporter didn't tell the whole story," he says, "and we don't think the article was very accurate. We were surprised that the *New York Times* would print an article like that without verifying it. [Schneider] basically took the opinions of a Mohawk fisherman over those of the Environment Division scientists.

"He did not seem to be concerned with talking about the environmental

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problems and what needed to be done. Instead, he was concerned with talking about how much [the river] would cost to clean up properly."

Such an emphasis is consistent with Schneider's long-running flirtation with the conservative "Wise Use" movement, whose basic tenet is that the rights of private industry and property owners are being threatened by environmental regulators.

In 1991, for example, Schneider wrote an article downplaying the dangers of dioxin, a reputed carcinogen. To illustrate his point, he argued that the substance was no more harmful than a week of sunbathing—a metaphor he came up with in consultation with several sources. The claim was then widely repeated in other publications, which variously attributed it to "top federal scientists," "some health experts," and a "widening group of scientists."

Schneider stands by his dioxin work, despite a three-year Environmental Protection Agency study released last year showing that not only is dioxin likely to be a major source of cancers but also that it may seriously damage the human immune, endocrine and reproductive systems.

The Alonzo for Public Disservice (co-winner): Brit Hume, ABC News

Anyone who really believes the Gingrich-Limbaugh talk about a "liberal bias" in the mainstream media should take a close look at the double life of Brit Hume. By day, Hume covers President Clinton as the "unbiased" White House reporter for ABC News; in his spare time, as a contributor to right-wing publications such as *The National Review* and *The American Spectator*, Hume regularly attacks President Clinton.

"For a White House reporter to be peddling propaganda for either the left or right is outrageous," says Jack Nelson, a 1960 Pulitzer Prize winner and Washington bureau chief of the *Los Angeles Times*. "And I think that any news organization that allows someone to do that is not a self-respecting news organization."

But Nelson believes Hume is guilty of more than a simple conflict of interest. He suspects that the ABC reporter was actively involved in a political intrigue aimed against the White House. At issue is the "troopergate" controversy, in which four Arkansas state troopers charged that Bill Clinton used them to arrange and conceal his sexual affairs—and then tried to buy their silence with offers of federal jobs.

Longtime Clinton nemesis Cliff Jackson, the troopers' lawyer, reportedly tried to break the story through two outlets: Nelson's *Times* and *The American Spectator*. When the *Times* proceeded cautiously with its investigation, rumors began circulating in Washington that Nelson was threatening to quit unless the *Times* story was spiked.

Nelson, who denies the rumor, says he tracked it back through several channels, and discovered that in each case it had originated with Hume. "I assume he felt that if word got around enough, it might somehow pry [the troopergate story] loose," says Nelson, who believes Hume's alleged conduct "was totally outrageous for a professional journalist."

Hume has denied that he had any intention of trying to pressure the *Times*. But Nelson is not Hume's only detractor. In a 1993 story about the arrogance of the Washington press corps, Eleanor Clift and Mark Miller of *Newsweek* used Hume as their prime example. They described a White House briefing in which he ignored subjects such as Bosnia and health care in favor of a more immediate concern. "[T]he ABC newsman," they wrote, "wanted to know why the press had been served cold food—a mere croissant, yogurt and fruit—on a flight to New Hampshire aboard a White House charter."

Clift and Miller concluded that "the White House press room has never been as relentlessly petty and mean as it is today." But apparently petty and mean is what gets you to the top in the modern-day press corps. In 1994, Clift stepped aside as *Newsweek*'s White House correspondent after lengthy negotiations with her bosses. *Newsweek* editors—under pressure from the right—had expressed concern that she was too vocal in her support of Clinton on CNN's *The McLaughlin Group*. Brit Hume, meanwhile, remains on the White House beat—when he's not beating on the White House.

The Alonzo for National Reporting: *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*

During the health care debate in Washington, industry-sponsored sources released a report that falsely claimed 500,000 New Yorkers had lost their health coverage when the state adopted an insurance reform law. According to the *Columbia Journalism Review*, the skewed statistic was then quoted as fact by writers for the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and the *New York Times*. By the time Rep. Dick Armey (R-TX) appeared on the *NewsHour*, he was claiming that *500 million* New Yorkers had lost their insurance as a result of the reform. Reporter Margaret Warner let Armey's preposterous assertion go unquestioned.

The Alonzo for International Reporting: *Newsweek*

Joseph Pulitzer, who made a fortune with sensational headlines such as A WELL-KNOWN CITIZEN STRICKEN DOWN IN THE ARMS OF HIS MISTRESS and A FORTUNE SQUANDERED IN DRINK, would have loved the cover *Newsweek* printed following the death of North Korean leader Kim Il Sung. Appearing on July 18, during the height of the U.S.-North Korean diplomatic crisis, the cover contemplated KOREA AFTER KIM: THE HEADLESS BEAST. Old Joe also would have admired the coverage inside, which included panicked platitudes about Kim ("[H]is death made the world even more dangerous, not less") and lurid sexual rumors about his son, Kim Jong Il ("They say he is a voracious womanizer, served by squads of imported hookers called 'Pleasure Teams' ").

Yet as Mike Moore observed in *The Bulletin of the*

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Atomic Scientists, "While *Newsweek*'s 'beast' cover surely grabbed attention on U.S. magazine stands, it just as surely must have gotten attention in the paranoia-prone halls of the Pyongyang government. At a time when war talk hangs in the air, calling the other guy a 'headless beast' is a no-brainer."



The Alonzo for Investigative Reporting: John Stossel, *20/20*

In April, ABC reporter Stossel hosted an hour-long special called "Are We Scaring Ourselves to Death?" It suggested that federal environmental health and safety regulations are based on alarmist assumptions about industrial health hazards. Stossel professes a deep faith in the power of the market to solve the country's problems. And why shouldn't he? The market has been very good to him. In November, for example, Stossel spoke before a health-industry trade group and called for the Food and Drug Administration to be disbanded. He was reportedly paid $11,000 for his opinions.

The Alonzo for Spot News Coverage: NBC

The network was unable to decide whether to cover an NBA championship game between the New York Knicks and Houston Rockets or the O.J. Simpson car standoff. After trying a split-screen format, NBC finally opted for the basketball game—only after the sun had set in Los Angeles, shrouding the Simpson home in darkness. As the game wound down, NBC completely missed Simpson's surrender. Luckily, neither event ended in sudden death.

The Alonzo for Commentary: Vin Weber and Tom Downey, National Public Radio

The two former congressmen—the first, a Republican, the second, a Democrat—appeared together on "Morning Edition" to debate health care reform. Although in theory the two were supposed to provide divergent viewpoints on the issue, NPR failed to mention that they were both working as lobbyists for health insurance companies and other interested parties.

The Alonzo for Editorial Writing: *The Wall Street Journal*

The *Journal*'s editorial page—which has brought us such right-wing conspiracy theories as the mythical Bulgarian plot to kill the pope—was at it again in 1994. On March 23, an editorial hinted that *New Republic* writer L.J. Davis had been roughed up in Little Rock because he was pursuing leads in the Whitewater story. Davis woke up in his Little Rock hotel room with a bump on his head and his door ajar. "Nothing was missing except four 'significant' pages of his notebook that included a list of names and sources," the *Journal* reported ominously.

Davis, on the other hand, conceded to the *New York Observer* that he had been drinking before the incident, about which he had no memory, and that "four of my notebook pages were partially torn out. I could have done that ... when I stuffed the damn thing in my shoulder bag."

The Alonzo for features: Connie Chung, CBS

Chung got a big exclusive—permission to travel with controversial figure skater Tonya Harding to the Olympic Games. Unfortunately, Chung told viewers, "[Harding's] lawyers wouldn't allow us to ask some important questions—questions about the attack on Nancy Kerrigan, for instance." Chung was, however, able to reveal to the world that Harding was "determined."

Reports David Zurawik in *American Journalism Review*, "Getting [Heidi] Fleiss or Harding to do an interview with you—whether or not they say anything of interest or importance—has become the measure of excellence in TV newsmagazine journalism."

The Alonzo for Explanatory Journalism: *The San Jose Mercury News*

Faced with an advertising boycott by auto dealers who were angry about an article telling consumers how to avoid paying high prices for a new car, the *Mercury News* took out a full-page house ad. It listed "10 reasons why you should buy or lease your next new car from a factory authorized dealer."

The Alonzo for Criticism: Michael Medved, *USA Weekend*

In a cover story titled "Hollywood got the message," the superbly smug Medved claimed "my controversial book *Hollywood vs. America*" prompted a public outcry that forced the movie industry to produce more wholesome films. Medved's peers begged to differ. "I have never met a film critic who would so shamelessly suggest that his or her opinions influenced the direction of the film industry," *New York* magazine's John Powers told the *Los Angeles Times*.◀

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MEDIA

We want the airwaves

How to put the public interest back in the press.

By Jim Naureckas

In the world according to contemporary conservatives, the media is dominated by a liberal—or even leftist—"cultural elite" given to running down the virtues of big business and the values of the average Joe. Newt Gingrich has recently suggested that advertisers boycott newspapers that run "anti-business" editorials. Heads of congressional committees are aglow with the idea of "privatizing" public broadcasting.

In this climate, it's easy to imagine the media becoming worse rather than better. But the news industry now is not that different from the one the Republicans dream of: Media conglomerates look out first and foremost for their business interests, newspapers (out of respect for their big advertisers) rarely take positions critical of business, and PBS is so beholden to corporate sponsors and congressional conservatives that the term "public broadcasting" is a misnomer.

It's easy to blame the flaws of contemporary journalism on the failings of individual journalists. Sure, there are plenty of reporters who are lazy, stupid or biased. But the real problems of our media are structural: A free press cannot serve its function as a vehicle for democratic debate when it is owned, controlled and paid for by a tiny, unrepresentative few. "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one," A.J. Liebling said. And there aren't many in that select group.

We need, first of all, to stop thinking of the media in terms of the "free market." Markets cannot and do not provide us with all we need in other areas of life—otherwise there would be no need for public highways, schools or police.

And when it comes to the media, the "free market" model is even less appropriate. Broadcasters don't sell programming to viewers—they sell audiences to advertisers. Instead of saying, "This show is brought to you by Exxon," advertisers would be more honest if they said, "You are brought to Exxon by this show." This is true for the print media as well: When you put down 50 cents to buy a newspaper, the newspaper receives as much as two dollars from advertisers using its pages to get to you.

Advertisers know they have economic power over news outlets and are increasingly unafraid to use it to garner favorable press or to suppress critical reports. So local papers avoid stories on used-car scams, and most magazines rarely mention that cigarettes cause cancer. There's also a more subtle effect: The content of print and broadcast media alike needs to harmonize with the main business at hand, which is convincing consumers to buy.

If we want mass media that aren't bought and paid for by corporate advertisers, then we have to pay for it ourselves—through public financing. This defies, of course, the current conventional wisdom that the main function of government is to cut taxes and eliminate services. But there are relatively painless ways to raise money to support a public sector media.

A tax on advertising, for example, could prove quite popular. Not only do people dislike commercials, but there is also a certain logic in the public taking a cut when private businesses sell the airwaves, a public resource, for their own profit. Florida tried an ad tax a few years ago, and backed off after advertisers launched a boycott—but advertisers are exceedingly unlikely to boycott the entire U.S. market.

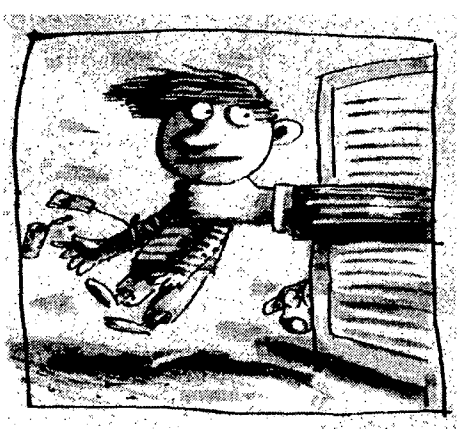
Since advertising is a $149-billion-a-year industry, even a 5 percent tax would produce billions of dollars in revenue—many times more than PBS now receives. What to do with all that money? Optimally, we could replace the current

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media monoculture—in which corporate, for-profit media is practically the only crop—with a more healthily diverse ecosystem, where people have a choice between various kinds of media structures.

In a truly mixed media, a large part of the communications industry would remain in private, corporate hands. Advertising could continue to be the main source of revenue. There are ways to offer television for profit, however, that allow both broadcasters and viewers to avoid the entanglements of commercialism. For example, owners of TV stations could divide up proceeds from a TV tax, based on what share of viewers are tuning in to each channel. This would still be market television, but it would be a market responsive to individual viewers, not corporate advertisers.

Some of the money from an advertising tax could go directly to an expanded and empowered public media—on the model of the BBC or its Canadian and Australian imitators. Care would have to be taken to ensure that these media are truly independent of the state—which means that funds have to be independent of annual appropriation. If Congress controls the pursestrings, the new media will be little more than an outlet for official propaganda, as PBS is becoming today through its pandering to congressional critics.



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But between corporate and state media are a whole array of possible private, nonprofit alternatives. Some of these already exist as shadows of what they might become: PBS and NPR, freed from the dependence on corporate benefactors, could become worthy of the name "public." Community radio stations, with some serious public funding, could compete on an even footing with commercial media.

The government should encourage as mixed a media economy as possible. Public funding should underwrite the expression of forthright, distinct, even controversial, points of view. Groups and labor organizations should all have their own outlets—like the right's National Empowerment Television, but with those parts of the political spectrum that aren't likely to be bankrolled by corporations or wealthy donors given a chance. Religious groups (and irreligious groups) of all stripes should have a chance to talk to people, without needing to promise eternal salvation for those viewers willing to phone in their credit card numbers.

This kind of federal subsidy need not be limited to broadcast media. Newspapers are no less beholden to corporate advertisers than radio and television stations. And the typical consumer has less choice in selecting a daily print news source than a daily news broadcast. The written word will always be the preferred medium for discussion in depth, so a society truly committed to fostering democratic discourse will give it the encouragement it deserves.

Right now, of course, society doesn't seem eager to make such a dramatic, structural transformation. But even within the current media structure there are some real possibilities for meaningful change.

We could start by putting some teeth back into the "public interest" standard that holders of broadcast licenses are supposed to meet. As a condition for the renewal of their broadcasting licenses, station owners used to have to demonstrate that they were making at least a minimal effort to serve the public good. But in the Reagan era, FCC regulators decided that any program with high ratings had to be serving the public interest, simply because the public was interested in it.

As a way of enforcing a stricter definition of "public interest," the FCC could demand that broadcasters provide quality programming for children as a condition for renewing their licenses—as the Children's Television Act already mandates. TV and radio stations could be made to demonstrate that their news broadcasts are aimed at serving community needs. The FCC could reinstate the Fairness Doctrine, which by requiring balanced coverage of controversial issues gives excluded voices an opportunity to be heard.

The FCC is supposed to ensure that license holders are of "good character," but that criteria doesn't seem to apply when the license holders are corporations. General Electric, for example, is allowed to own NBC, despite a long record of corporate felonies. Why should a multinational giant involved in weapons production, nuclear power and toxic waste dumping get to have its own TV network, anyway? The FCC ought to protect audiences from the conflicts of interest that result when major media are owned by the very corporations they are supposed to be covering.

Antitrust laws could be resuscitated and applied vigorously to media conglomerates. Over the last decade, a small number of corporations have bought up more and more of the publishing industry—a dangerous trend toward media monopoly that ought to be reversed.

The media need to change, and change fundamentally. But not all changes need to come through the government. If grass-roots public-interest groups put more energy into responding to biased news coverage of their issues, they could provide a counterbalance to the constant, orchestrated attacks on the media from the right. And if progressive foundations could put more resources into funding alternative media, that would go a long way toward answering the misinformation spread so effectively by a well-funded conservative press. ◀

Jim Naureckas is the editor of *Extra!*, the magazine of the media watch group FAIR.

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ENVIRONMENT

Green day

How to make environmental politics matter again.

By Will Nixon

Last November 8, conservationists and social justice advocates won 10 of the 11 ballot initiatives in Arizona, where voters banned trapping on public lands and passed a 40-cents-a-pack cigarette tax. But the progressives didn't break out the champagne and carrot juice. That same day, every congressional representative with a good environmental record lost. "We have failed miserably as a conservation community," says Rod Mondt of the Wildlands Project in Tucson. "We have to make the environment a cause célèbre again."

It's a difficult task, but not an impossible one. Here, just in time for Earth Day, are some suggestions from the front lines:

Take Marriage Counseling. If the movement learns anything from the 100 Days, it should be the power of unity. But the rift between national groups and grassroots organizers has yet to heal. Many local environmentalists view their Washingtonian counterparts as "career environmentalists" who make their living like car mechanics, endlessly tinkering with the laws. The Washingtonians, for their part, look down on the local "firebrands," seeing them as completely out of step with the realities of national politics.

In truth, the movement needs agitators and policy analysts alike. The national groups have produced a great deal of impressive research, translating the House assault on regulation into stark terms that editorial writers, reporters and the public can understand. The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), for example, produced a 125-page dissection of the Job Creation and Wage Enhancement Act entitled "Breach of Faith" that revealed the environmental dangers lurking behind such innocuous-sounding policy buzzwords as "risk assessment" and "cost-benefit analysis."

But without grass-roots support such important work can go to waste. Though the NRDC called its opposition to this act "our single most important environmental campaign ever," the bill sailed though the House. Part of the problem, says Lois Gibbs, head of the Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste, is that Washington environmentalists are "clueless about dealing with the grass roots"—activists who have been kept outside of the Washington decision-making process. Gibbs finds that the most potent issue among the groups she deals with is dioxin. A mailing about it soon after the election drew the strongest response in her group's 14-year history. "People are really scared," she says, and dioxin is an issue that "hits very close to home. With the Contract on America it will only get worse."

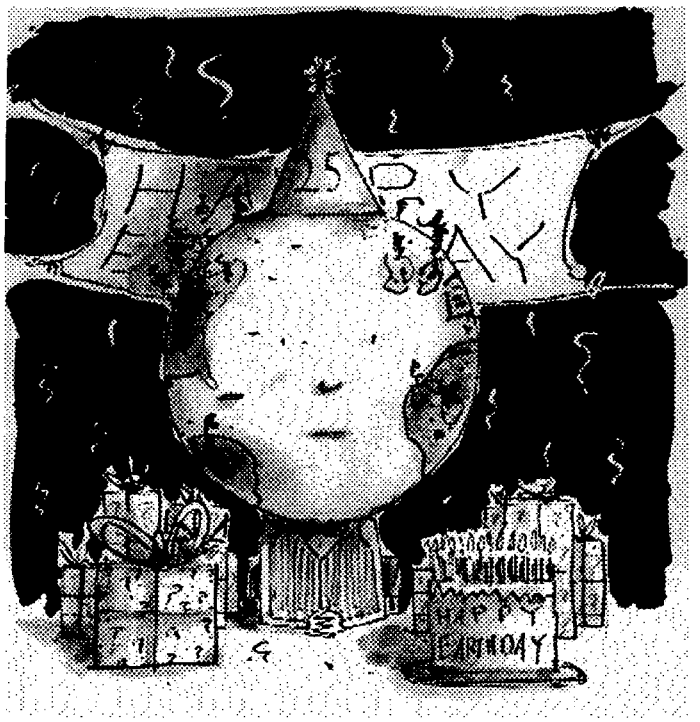
Get a Vision. The Washington groups serve as the guilty conscience of the federal environmental system by filing lawsuits and releasing embarrassing reports to prod the agencies along. The NRDC, for example, recently reviewed government data to document more than 100 outbreaks of disease from drinking water, involving some half a million victims, between 1986 and 1994. It found that one-fifth of the public drinks tap water from systems that don't meet EPA health standards. Similarly, the Environmental Working Group learned from Food and Drug Administration data that anyone who eats the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables each day ends up consuming illegal pesticides some 100 times a year.

But this valuable detail work hasn't been translated into a broad, galvanizing vision for the movement. Tim Hermach of the Native Forest Council recommends keeping the message simple and direct. His group advocates "zero cut" on national lands, a complete ban on commercial logging, grazing and mining. The message is straightforward, compelling, absolute—private industries are stealing and defacing public

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property, he tells local audiences, and taxpayers subsidize them with billions of dollars a year. "It works," he says, "The only people I have trouble with are the [Washington] environmentalists," who consider "zero cut" politically unrealistic.

The absolute approach is often as effective environmentally as it is potent politically. When we banned lead in gasoline, emissions dropped 98 percent. When we controlled the ingredients of smog, ground-level ozone dropped by 27 percent. Today, Greenpeace adopts an uncompromising line in its campaign against the industrial use of chlorine, a source of our worst pollutants like dioxin. "The largest new paper mill in the country in West Virginia will use chlorine bleaching," says Rick Hind of the group. "That's absolutely insane." The EPA could phase out chlorine in an upcoming set of new rules for the pulp and paper industry, but Hind doesn't expect miracles. "This is a spineless administration," he says.



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Target Companies, Not Politicians. Many environmental groups want to sell politics to a public that's sick of politics. "You *know* the reality," says Michael Colby of Food & Water Inc., in Marshfield, Vt. "You can send your letter to Congress, but the other side will send a million bucks." Environmental groups in Washington, D.C. use fax trees and e-mail to alert members about rapid-fire votes on the Hill, but they don't have the funds to compete with industry lobbyists. "Industry has ads on TV day in and day out," says Steve Holmer of the Western Ancient Forests Campaign. "Our annual budget could probably pay for two ads for two days."

But if environmentalists are outgunned on the Hill, they have proved effective in confronting corporations concerned about maintaining good PR. Even though the procedure is legal, Food & Water has helped stop food irradiation for nearly a decade by encouraging its 125,000 members to lobby supermarkets and food companies. Colby says the public prefers to confront companies rather than politicians. When people realize "their call made a difference," he says, they stay engaged. "Once people taste that power, they're ready for the next step." Food & Water is now fighting the bovine growth hormone (BGH) the same way, by picking on Land-O-Lakes, which sells one product free of the hormone but not their entire line. While Food & Water focused on industry, other groups campaigned—unsuccessfully—for a congressional ban on BGH.

Take Another Look at the Law. In 1993, the independent Environmental Working Group conducted a full review of the EPA and found that "the U.S. has the most

If you can't beat them...

It's an odd couple, to be sure, but there is a certain logic to the alliance: Friends of the Earth has joined the conservative National Taxpayers Union Foundation at the head of a coalition that wants $33 billion cut from programs that degrade the land or waste money on nuclear research. In the last Congress, this "green scissors" approach helped kill five programs, thus saving some $7 billion. Now the coalition has targeted 34 budget items that include:

•New highways in Indiana, West Virginia and Los Angeles, where a proposed 6.2-mile route through historic Pasadena and Hispanic East L.A. would cost $1.1 billion, destroying up to 1,500 homes and 7,000 trees while laying down eight lanes of pavement.

•Exotic nuclear research projects such as the Gas Turbine-Modular Helium Reactor, the Tokamak Physics Experiment Reactor, the Atomic Vapor Laser Isotope Separator, and the proposed National Ignition Facility that would use lasers to simulate nuclear bomb blasts indoors. (See *ITT*, December 12.)

•Subsidies for irrigation, grazing and coyote killing, among other things. And funds for new roads in our national forests—which already have a system eight times longer than our interstate highways.

Will the strategy work? "The signs aren't good," says Ralph De Genarro, a budget analyst at Friends of the Earth, noting that congressional Republicans seem more interested in cutting environmental programs than those that hurt the environment.

—W.N.

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comprehensive set of environmental laws in the world," but that the EPA "cannot ensure that American communities and industries are in compliance with a single federal environmental law."

But the problem goes much deeper than lax enforcement. Environmental laws remain "an afterthought to the main body of development law—banking, real estate, contracts—which is infused with maxims promoting rapid use of resources," explained William Futrell, president of the Environmental Law Institute, at an international conference last year. Few people realize how restricted the movement has been by laws that only allow legal remedy to "corporate behavior ... after the fact." All of the major decisions about the development of natural resources remain in private hands.

"Our bedrock laws—contracts, torts, negligence, property, constitutional—are inherently anti-nature, anti-people and anti-community," says Richard Grossman, author with Frank Adams of a pamphlet, *Taking Care of Business: Citizenship and the Charter of Incorporation*. While environmental groups have a vested interest in the regulatory laws that they've helped create and enforce, he believes that we must cut to the core of the problem: corporate charters that grant businesses the right to do what they do. Early in our history, state legislatures issued charters sparingly, limiting the wealth a corporation could legally hold and dissolving those that misbehaved. By the 1870s, however, things had begun to change. The bedrock laws were stacked to give corporations great "privileges and immunities" from the public. Today, corporations account for more than 98 percent of our private economic output.

We live in a "corporate colonial culture," Grossman says, but we may be ready for rebellion. "Newt Gingrich uses the rhetoric of the American Revolution, the language of sovereignty and self-government," he says. We should use the same words ourselves in demanding a new Contract with the Earth. ◀

Will Nixon writes frequently on the environment for *In These Times*.

Jurassic Planet

On the 44th day of the House's 100-day rampage through the liberal welfare state, Newt Gingrich donned his triceratops dinosaur tie to talk about the environment. "My staff hates these things, but every once in a while I just can't resist," he told the crowd. The triceratops is extinct, he said, but "life is like that." Even if conservationists had existed in the Paleozoic Age to sponsor "the society for the Preservation of Troglodytes," they couldn't have stopped the flux of nature. Neither can we. "At some point in the next 50,000 years the Earth [will] tilt," Gingrich announced, which will "change totally the ecosystems you're prepared currently to spend endless quantities to save." The Sahara may bloom again, and wetlands may turn into deserts.

Many conservatives like to invoke volcanoes, earthquakes and geologic time to reassure a public largely ignorant about nature that our scratches on the planet will be erased in time. "I'm very much in favor of the environment," Gingrich told the audience, but not the "static preservationists" who would regulate the human race out of existence. Gingrich prefers the voluntary tradition of the National Audubon Society. He picked up trash every morning when he was in high school, and is now "very active at Zoo Atlanta." Active at what, he didn't say.

Among the Republican leadership Gingrich may be a moderate. House Minority Whip Tom DeLay, a former exterminator from Houston, told the *Wall Street Journal* that he couldn't think of one regulation he supports. He's still smarting over the loss of DDT. "They banned chemicals and drove up the cost of doing business," he complains. DeLay assembled a business coalition, Project Relief, that lobbied cost-benefit analysis, takings and the regulatory moratorium through the House. He has a special aversion to the Clean Air Act of 1990, which he'd like to repeal.

Rep. Don Young (R-AK), who chairs the House Resources Committee, told the *Anchorage Daily News* that environmentalists are "the most despicable group I've ever heard of." He elaborated in a newsletter by calling them a "waffle-stomping, Harvard-graduating, intellectual bunch of idiots." Young dreams of dissolving the Forest Service and opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil exploration. His committee may soon take up the idea of establishing a National Parks Closure Commission.

The newcomers have hardly been any better. During her campaign, Rep. Helen Chenoworth of Idaho held an "endangered salmon bake" fundraiser. And Sonny Bono of Palm Springs, Calif., has recommended that we place all endangered species in "a designated area and then blow it up." All told, the League of Conservation Voters "100 day" score card gives 61 of the 73 Republican freshman a "0."

In the past, the Republican Party has produced some great conservationists, starting with Teddy Roosevelt, whom Gingrich and others invoke to cover their tracks. Carrying on the conservationist tradition today is Sherwood Boehlert of upstate New York. In the last Congress he sponsored bills to raise the EPA to cabinet status and to reform the Clean Water Act. This year he pushed amendments to the risk-assessment bill, "an overbroad shotgun approach," he said, that might lead to "an enormous increase in frivolous litigation," and the takings bill, "a budget boondoggle" that would lead us into "Rod Serling's *Twilight Zone*." The amendments failed, so he voted against both bills. If only he had more friends. —W.N.

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POLITICS

Cutting corporate aid

What's wrong with the campaign against corporate welfare?

By David Moberg

If Congress is going to curtail welfare for the poor, isn't it time to cut out welfare for the rich and big corporations as well? As Republicans press ahead on the Contract with America, that question has gained new credibility in Washington—and has a strong potential appeal to an angry citizenry beyond the Beltway. Yet even if it provides a tactical opening for long-standing liberal crusades against business "hogs at the trough," this new campaign also could meet with serious pitfalls.

Late last year, Labor Secretary Robert Reich created a stir when he urged a review of "corporate welfare." Since then an outpouring of lists of egregious and cuttable "aid for dependent corporations" has come from varied points on the political spectrum—including the free-market conservative Cato Institute on the right, the centrist Progressive Policy Institute (PPI), and on the left, Ralph Nader's Essential Information project and the Progressive Caucus in the House. An eclectic mix of environmental and anti-tax groups also put together a narrower proposal for taking a "green scissors" to projects that waste money and destroy the environment.

Attacking corporate privilege wasn't part of Newt's Contract, but many new congressional conservatives share a distaste for both big government and big business. Cutting corporate welfare is not on Bill Clinton's current agenda, either, even though he embraced corporate tax and subsidy reforms in his presidential campaign.

But precisely because of its across-the-board appeal, the attack on "corporate welfare" may meet with success in the new conservative Congress. The 33-member Progressive Caucus has asked House Speaker Newt Gingrich to schedule debate on their Corporate Responsibility Act shortly after the Easter break. The caucus hopes that the act, which would cut tens of billions in tax loopholes and subsidies to business, will force a debate on the real priorities of the Republican "revolution" in Congress.

As a populist stick to beat the corporations, the campaign against corporate welfare is well-timed and powerful. Citing the draconian cuts proposed in "what remains of the social safety net for the most vulnerable Americans," Vermont Congressman Bernie Sanders has thundered against "the millionaires and multinational corporations [who] continue to receive tens of billions in huge tax breaks and subsidies from Uncle Sam unscathed." Why whack the needy and excuse the greedy? Posed as a survey question, the proposition would probably win over 90 percent approval.

But despite the intentions of its progressive supporters, the campaign against corporate welfare is framed in terms that could backfire on the left. It implicitly accepts the legitimacy of the assault on welfare for the poor and condones both deficit reduction and cutting government overall. It can also help reinforce the belief that the economy should be governed only by the market and not by public policy.

"One thing that bothers me about the corporate welfare idea is that it's a concession that the other kind of welfare is no good," says Economic Policy Institute economist Max Sawicky. "Welfare shouldn't be placed on the same moral plane as tax expenditures."

The strategy also runs the risk that the Clinton administration—in the name of deficit reduction—could be tempted to accept many Republican social program cuts in exchange for cutting some "corporate welfare." But Sawicky argues that trade-off would be fiscally misguided. The deficit now is not too big; the prospect of huge future deficits comes only from rising health care costs; and the best response to that threat is single-payer national health insurance. Swapping Democratic-sponsored cuts in tax expenditures on

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business for Republican-backed social cuts would also lead to a political debacle, he argues: The Democrats would sacrifice still more of their remaining base, and deficit hawks would only call for more cuts in social programs.

There is both common ground and significant difference among the lists of undesirable business handouts. Virtually all of the groups denouncing corporate welfare agree on ending some particularly vulgar examples, such as Forest Service construction of about $140 million worth of roads each year to subsidize timber companies logging public lands. Likewise, most critics are quick to target the nearly $500 million a year in agribusiness export promotion that mainly benefits huge companies like Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland. (The latter is also the principal beneficiary of the widely criticized ethanol tax break.) In all the lists, agribusiness, transportation and energy programs account for much of the dubious direct subsidies.

How much does it all add up to? Cato found about $86 billion worth cutting in this year's budget, Nader's Essential Information project identified about $167 billion, and PPI found savings over five years of $131 billion in spending and $134 billion in tax reforms. By comparison, estimates from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities find that total spending each year on social "welfare"—means-tested programs for recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children—comes to about $60 billion or less.

The corporate budget-cutting lists also differ on which specific programs would go. And these differences illustrate bigger political disagreements. Only conservative Cato analysts include nearly $13 billion in military appropriations in their list, which singles out several weapons systems. But they don't propose scrapping subsidies for military exports—as PPI and Nader's group do. The Progressive Caucus and PPI would do away with NASA's space station ($11 billion over five years); only Essential Information would ax $5.4 billion a year in foreign aid that mainly finances arms sales.

Yet all, including the Progressive Caucus, would do away with the Technology Reinvestment Project, even though—flawed as it is—this relatively small agency remains one of the few government programs that indirectly aids defense industry conversion. Cato would systematically wipe out all other aid related to military conversion.

The new campaign against corporate perks and privilege splits over how to treat tax breaks for business. Cato agrees that unjustified tax breaks exist. But Cato researchers Stephen Moore and Dean Stansel say they "reject the notion that allowing a company to keep its earnings and pay less in taxes is somehow a 'subsidy.' " They would eliminate tax breaks only as part of the initiative to reduce taxes overall.

Other opponents of corporate welfare would recover some of the lost taxes for government uses, either deficit reduction or new public investments. Sanders emphasizes collecting corporate taxes now underpaid (especially by foreign companies in the United States). He would also eliminate the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (which insures multinational investments overseas) and ax other incentives for U.S. companies to invest abroad. PPI identifies $21 billion (over five years) in energy industry tax subsidies; Nader's group cites as a subsidy—by far the largest—nearly $60 billion a year in excise taxes that it believes should be imposed on continued emissions by corporate polluters.

Curiously, all of the proposals attack—to varying degrees—various high technology R&D projects, such as the semiconductor industry alliance and a number of Commerce Department projects, including the Advanced Technology Program, Manufacturing Technology Centers, and the "clean car" initiative with the Big Three auto manufacturers. These are the tiny buds of "industrial policy" that the Clinton administration has tried to nurture as a way of promoting innovation and the competitiveness of American industries in the global economy. All of these small programs are flawed, but they also signal a potentially constructive role for government in shaping economic growth—especially if they set a precedent for making corporations strictly accountable to the public good.

The wholesale attack on corporate subsidies runs another important risk: it lends credence, however indirectly, to the Cato-style philosophy that any government interference in the free market—including progressive taxes or car safety regulation—is bad. Government aid to business of any type just wastes money, costs consumers, fosters an incestuous relationship between business and government, and is both anticapitalist and anticonstitutional, Cato argues.

When it comes to the market and its prerogatives, the centrist and progressive attacks on corporate welfare are more ambiguous. Despite its scathing indictments of government programs and uncritical adulation of competition, PPI argues that government has a modest role to play in the marketplace. It proposes that money saved from subsidies and tax breaks go toward deficit reduction, worker training, infrastructure construction and repair and basic research. Both the Progressive Caucus and the Nader group focus on the inequity of the corporate boondoggles. Janice Shields, author of the Essential Information study, describes the Nader strategy as "attacking corporate power."

Yet even if all the unjustifiable corporate subsidies and tax breaks go, corporate power will remain intact. And small businesses are no alternative: They are not in principle better for workers, the environment or the common good than big businesses are. And to judge by the agendas of many small business PACs, they can even be worse.

Government spending and regulation are often corrupted to serve business ends, and the Republican agenda will deepen that corruption, even if "corporate welfare" is eliminated. To the extent that government leaves economic decisions to the marketplace, corporate power will be further strengthened. The broader exercise of that power, which shapes government at all levels, is the central issue—not the special favors carved out of an already inadequate federal budget. ◁

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POLITICS

Company men

The press conveniently forgets that political murderers have been on the CIA payroll for a long, long time.

By Robert Parry
WASHINGTON

Just as the controversy over the CIA's Aldrich Ames spy case had begun to die down, a new whiff of scandal began swirling around the embattled agency. The stench arose late last month when reports appeared linking two murders to a Guatemalan colonel who had been on the CIA's payroll at the time of the killings. One victim was a U.S. innkeeper who lived in the Guatemalan mountains and apparently stumbled upon evidence of army corruption in 1990. The other death, in 1992, was the torture-murder of a guerrilla leader married to an American citizen.

The colonel, Julio Roberto Alpirez, was a longtime favorite of the United States, having twice attended the U.S. Army's elite School of the Americas at Ft. Benning, Ga.

The Alpirez disclosures came from Rep. Robert Torricelli (D-NJ), a House Intelligence Committee member who had been pursuing demands for information from the guerrilla leader's widow, Jennifer Harbury. (See *In These Times*, December 12.) "The agency is simply out of control and contains what can only be called a criminal element," wrote Torricelli in a letter to President Clinton. The *New York Times* added its voice to the outrage, demanding "deep, comprehensive reform" at the spy agency. The *Times* editorial added that the Clinton administration should "make it clear that in the future rogue operators, who abuse their relationship with the United States, will be exposed rather than protected."

But the overriding fact that the *Times* and Torricelli missed—and that few in Washington want to admit—is that nothing in the alleged actions of Col. Alpirez can be termed "rogue" or even "out of control." For decades, the slaughter of dissidents in Latin America and the Caribbean—with tacit or explicit American support—has been routine. In Guatemala alone, the army has exterminated an estimated 140,000 of the country's people over the last three decades.

Throughout the hemisphere, the death toll of dissidents has been staggering. Countless thousands of Latin Americans have died under the guns, the machetes and the syringes of U.S.-supplied killers. Few groups have escaped the ongoing slaughter: peasants, Indians, labor organizers, religious leaders, teachers, intellectuals, journalists, children and a wide variety of innocents. Yet, even with the cover of the Cold War gone, cases like that of Col. Alpirez are treated as anomalies in Congress and the media. Such an interpretation allows Washington to sidestep the larger, more troubling conclusion that an influential segment of the capital's elite is implicated in the killing fields.

Culpability for the Latin American slaughter extends to many Democrats as well as Republicans. It was a bipartisan policy that either defended direct American interests—such as the United Fruit holdings that were protected during the U.S.-sponsored coup in Guatemala in 1954—or advanced the larger ideological crusade against the Soviet Union. Many prominent Washington journalists, too, built their careers by popularizing the tough geopolitical rationales for these murders.

At key moments, especially in the '80s, Washington pundits attacked human rights activists and even other reporters who tried to alert the public to the carnage. Today's pundit shows and opinion columns are filled with the ramblings of these highly paid journalists, such as Fred Barnes and Charles Krauthammer of *The New Republic*, the *Wall Street Journal*'s Robert Bartley and syndicated columnist Robert Novak. Many other big-time commentators kept their careers on track in the '80s by keeping quiet.

Indeed, it would be hard to fill an A-List social event in Georgetown without inviting respected Washington figures

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who have helped protect the Latin American assassins. Few in Washington even catch the irony of allowing such well-placed individuals to continue pontificating about their devotion to democratic values.

March 13 was a case in point. That morning, the *Washington Post*'s op-ed page featured a column by former United Nations Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick. It was one of her continuing complaints about the 1994 U.S. invasion of Haiti that removed a clique of brutal military dictators and restored popularly elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to office. Kirkpatrick, naturally, thought the dictators should have been left alone. "President Aristide's record did not suggest to me that he was himself seriously committed to democratic principles and norms," Kirkpatrick sniffed in the *Post*.

On the same day, the *New York Times* ran a front-page story about the democratic principles of Argentina's former military junta, which Kirkpatrick defended in the late '70s. A former Argentine naval officer, Adolfo Francisco Scilingo, described how he took part in "death flights" to dispose of political dissidents. The victims, including teenage boys and girls, were already weak from torture. Told they were being transferred to another detention center, the prisoners were hauled onto planes and injected with sedatives. With the plane in the air, the victims were stripped of their clothing and shoved out over the Atlantic Ocean. Scilingo estimated that from 1977-78, the military disposed of 1,500 to 2,000 human beings that way. In Argentina's "dirty war," the total killed and "disappeared" exceeded 13,000.

During that period, Kirkpatrick defended the dictators. To do so, she devised a suspect distinction between "authoritarian" rightist regimes, which could peacefully be transformed into democracies, and "totalitarian" leftist regimes, which could never go democratic. In her view, the Argentine junta represented a defensible "authoritarian" regime while the rulers of the Soviet bloc were irredeemable. By the end of the '80s—as peaceful revolutions swept Communist regimes from power—Kirkpatrick's doctrine would be thoroughly debunked. But in the meantime, it had been used by the Reagan-Bush team to justify another bloodletting in Central America.

In El Salvador, Reagan's 1980 election was celebrated with an orgy of mass murder. The killing was so brazen that in December 1980 Salvadoran soldiers even waylaid four American churchwomen near the international airport. The soldiers dragged the women from their van, raped them and executed them with gunshots to the head. The bodies were dumped into shallow graves. Instead of simply denouncing these murders, the new Reaganites put their public relations savvy to work. For her part, Kirkpatrick declared that the rape-murder victims were "not just nuns. The nuns were political activists." Her suggestion, it seemed, was that it was not so bad to rape and murder political activists. The new Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, offered another defense: "The nuns may have run through a roadblock ... and there may have been an exchange of gunfire." Even at the time, State Department officials admitted that Haig's rationalizations were false. But the lying game was on.

In that first year, administration officials toyed with several methods of concealing the grim Salvadoran death toll. An early approach to counting the dead deflated the official number of killings attributed to government forces, while inflating the number that were blamed on the guerrillas. After that numbers game was exposed, the administration devised a new strategy that heralded gradual drops in the hundreds of weekly murders as proof that El Salvador's commitment to human rights was improving.

This pattern of deception was well established by late 1981, when gruesome reports began filtering out of a remote corner of El Salvador, near a village known as El Mozote. Two brave American journalists, the *New York Times*' Raymond Bonner and the *Washington Post*'s Alma Guillermoprieto, ventured into the rugged terrain. They found evidence of a widespread massacre carried out by the new U.S.-trained Atlacatl Battalion. Nearly a thousand peasants had been butchered in one late December sweep through the area. In El Mozote, children had been made to watch their fathers executed, then their mothers. Finally, with the parents dead, the children were hacked to death and set ablaze. Some of the girls were raped before being killed.

The Reagan administration again showed no interest in ascertaining the truth or punishing the perpetrators. Instead, the administration launched another PR offensive: the U.S. Embassy conducted a phony investigation. The news accounts were mocked as communist disinformation. The reporters were branded as dupes. The administration gave false testimony to a gullible Congress. The truth about El Mozote would not be revealed for a decade, when a United Nations forensic team excavated the massacre site in 1991 and found hundreds of skeletons.

By the early '80s, what was already clear from the El Mozote case was that journalists endangered their professional reputations by telling the truth. Both Bonner and Guillermoprieto saw their careers sidetracked. On the other hand, substantial rewards went to the journalists who played along with the administration. *The New Republic*'s Fred Barnes and Charles Krauthammer were two columnists who saw their careers soar in service to the president. Krauthammer bestowed the name "Reagan Doctrine" on the president's anti-communist interventions and gave the bloodshed a handy intellectual cachet.

Barnes carried his own bright torch for Reagan's Central American policies. In an influential January 20, 1986 *New Republic* story, Barnes labeled human rights groups a "Sandinista Lobby" for their criticism of Nicaraguan contra atrocities. In an April 7, 1986 article, Barnes described his visits to contra bases. He declared himself impressed by the many religious symbols he'd seen and the polite denials he received from contras implicated in atrocities.

The contra reality was far different, however. In 1981-82, the CIA had enlisted the Argentine intelligence services—veterans of their own "dirty war"—to train the contras in the finer arts of violence. These contra troops were

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then loosed upon defenseless villages near the Honduran border, predictably committing rapes, torture and cold-blooded murders. Then, in 1983-84, with the contra army collapsing under its bloody weight, the CIA secretly took control, using special military troops from other Latin American countries to launch a campaign of sabotage inside Nicaragua. Oil tanks were bombed, pipelines were destroyed, harbors were mined. As the World Court ruled in 1986, these direct U.S. actions were a clear violation of international law.

Though the shooting war was going badly in Nicaragua, the administration was continuing to build up the army of El Salvador and exploit loopholes to circumvent a human rights embargo against Guatemala. The administration slipped through "dual use" military items, such as army trucks, and suddenly "retired" Green Beret trainers were appearing at the front lines to advise the Guatemalan army. The Reagan-Bush team was also winning the propaganda battles in Washington. As the '80s wore on, more and more conservatives wriggled in the padded seats of national talk shows and clogged the editorial pages of major newspapers. Not coincidentally, fewer and fewer journalists dared to challenge administration policy on Central America.

Those trends continue today, with Krauthammer and Barnes earning big fees from columns, lectures and TV appearances. Barnes, already a regular on *The McLaughlin Group*, is now in line to co-host a new PBS public affairs series.

Given Washington's unwillingness to examine the dark underbelly of Reagan-Bush foreign policies, stories about Guatemalan murders and Argentine death flights will likely stay narrowly focused, with blame deposited at the feet of "rogue operators" or a "criminal element" in the CIA. The conservative *Washington Times* even hoped the Republican-controlled Congress would use hearings on the Guatemala case to defend President Reagan's aggressive anti-communism. "Hopefully, this time around, in this particular House, there won't be any confusion about just who the real good guys are on the international scene," the right-wing paper declared in an editorial. It remains unthinkable that the Washington "good guys" are really "friends of war criminals." ◀

Robert Parry, the author of *Fooling America* (William Morrow & Company, Inc.), writes frequently for *In These Times* about American foreign policy.

Editorial

Continued from page 2

cials, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, insist that we must continue to support the military because "it is Guatemala's only instrument of social order."

By assuring "social order," of course, these officials mean that the army in Guatemala—as in Haiti, El Salvador, Peru, Colombia, etc.—is the only instrument capable of protecting U.S.-based corporate investors and their allies among the local ruling elite, which means it is the only instrument capable of thwarting democracy. In other words, the money spent on training these assassins, and on direct military aid, is another one of the many forms of corporate welfare on which the U.S. government spends huge amounts of our money.

More recently, the CIA attempted to undermine the Clinton administration's efforts to reinstate Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide by circulating false reports about Aristide's mental health and his alleged proclivities for violence. The CIA used one of its agents, Emmanuel "Toto" Constant, to found and lead FRAPH, the "independent" terrorist group that routinely tortured and mutilated Aristide supporters. Even though these actions ran directly counter to official policy, no one associated with the CIA has been punished for them.

And probably nothing would have been done to discourage the CIA-guided army in Guatemala from continuing its assassinations if a brave American citizen, Jennifer Harbury, had not refused to remain silent about her missing husband, the Indian leader Efraín Bámaca Velásquez. Her persistence finally led Rep. Robert Torricelli (D-NJ) to reveal that a CIA asset, Col. Julio Roberto Alpirez, had ordered Bámaca's execution and had been involved in the assassination of Michael deVine, an American hotel owner who apparently made the fatal mistake of making a Guatemalan army officer wait while he served a Mayan Indian.

Torricelli's rare service to truth and democracy enraged House Speaker Newt Gingrich. Fuming, the leader of the Republican revolution proclaimed that Torricelli's disclosure was "totally unacceptable" because it caused "a public embarrassment to the United States." To his credit, Torricelli brushed Gingrich off as part of a conspiracy of silence and accused the Speaker of having "a stronger allegiance to the CIA than to the truth."

Since its inception almost half a century ago, the CIA has been engaged in activity similar to that in Haiti and Guatemala. But disclosure was nearly impossible during the Cold War, when the CIA could claim that its every action was part of the fight to the death against godless communism—and when the agency could brand anyone who criticized it as a comsymp. But the end of the Cold War has diminished the political sanctions against those who tell it like it is. The truth has been laid bare: the CIA does not defend democracy—it defends the corporate interests and the anti-democratic oligarchs that serve them throughout the developing world.

The question, then, is why should the American people continue to spend $29 billion a year to subsidize such an institution? ◀

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BLACK AMERICA

Call to order

Will Louis Farrakhan's success make racial hatred respectable?

By **Salim Muwakkil**

In these times of growing racial polarization, polls reveal that black and white Americans differ markedly on many public issues. Views about O.J. Simpson's guilt, for example, are starkly divided along racial lines: most whites think he's guilty, while most blacks think he's innocent.

But perhaps the most significant sign of racial polarization is the soaring success of Minister Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam (NOI).

In a recent poll conducted by the National Newspaper Publishers Association, a group that represents publishers of black-owned newspapers, Farrakhan was named black America's "most effective leader." This national survey was conducted in the late summer and fall of 1994, before the January arrest of Malcolm X's daughter, Qubilah Shabazz, in an alleged plot to assassinate Farrakhan. (See *In These Times*, Feb. 6, 1995.) But there's little sign that Shabazz's arrest has tarnished Farrakhan's reputation among black Americans. If anything, his expressions of sympathy for Malcolm's surviving family have only enhanced his image.

He remains the only black leader capable of attracting thousands to his speeches. Alone among contemporaries, Farrakhan is able to command the attention and corral the energies of the so-called hip-hop generation. He urges self-discipline, family reverence, hard work, honesty, civility and all the other virtues held dear by Judeo-Christian civilization. But at the same time, his fiery oratory includes large doses of black nationalist anger and conspiratorial rhetoric.

Nearly 15,000 people flocked to his annual "Saviours' Day" ceremony in Chicago on February 26, where Farrakhan devoted much of his speech to the nefarious role of international bankers in forming the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank. In his address, the 61-year-old NOI leader blamed Meyer Amschel Rothschild, Paul Warburg and other "Jewish and non-Jewish financiers" for provoking world conflicts in order to reap profits. He named the FBI, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith and the Federal Reserve as co-conspirators in this process. Farrakhan charged the ADL and the FBI with attacking "anybody who would expose those Jews who have been at the root of the control of the banking system of the Federal Reserve." These are the same culprits who figure in the literature of racist right-wing groups such as the Posse Comitatus. The Christian Coalition's Pat Robertson cites similar enemies in his 1991 tome *The New World Order*.

This is no coincidence. The same forces of polarization at work among white Americans—declining wages and economic insecurity—also are at work in the African-American community. Right-wing populism is the mainstream manifestation of those forces, and Farrakhan's program of black self-reliance plays well in this new climate.

When the NOI premiered its opulent Salaam Restaurant complex last February, Farrakhan pitched the event both as a business debut and an ideological triumph. The mainstream media bought the spin.

In fact, some of the stories portrayed Farrakhan more as a celebrity restaurateur than the controversial firebrand America loves to hate. Like Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan and

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Mike Ditka, Farrakhan was depicted as just another famous Chicagoan with a trendy eatery. The *Chicago Sun-Times*' religion editor doubled as a restaurant critic and produced two prominently featured stories on the NOI's adventure in fine dining. The *New York Times* led its March 1 "Living Arts" section with a respectful story headlined "Bean Pies Have a Grand New Home in Chicago." *Business Week* contributed a flattering piece about the NOI's three-year economic plan, and other publications offered similarly glowing accounts.

Many observers were puzzled by the complimentary coverage the event received. The *New York Times*' A.M. Rosenthal made the point in an angry column. "The restaurant got long stories, adoring neighborhood comment, celebrities, pictures, interviews—public relations paradise," he wrote, perplexed and perhaps angry that his beloved *Times* had joined the media frenzy. "For those who fight racists or should, the name of the game is deny them their goal—the respectability and political acceptance they crave as a foundation for growth."

As if following Rosenthal's advice, the *Chicago Tribune* launched a four-part series on the NOI that detailed fraud, exploitation and inefficiency within the group's intensely secretive business structure. Actually, the articles were the culmination of a six-month investigation into the business dealings and personalities of the NOI leadership. But by focusing so intently on the shoddiness of the NOI's business practices, the articles failed to take seriously the group's ideological commitment to the concept of black self-reliance.

That commitment was on display at the Salaam Restaurant event, and for many it provoked a newfound respect for Farrakhan's NOI. For one thing, reporters covering the affair no doubt were impressed by the incongruity of the restaurant's location; the elegant complex—which includes a bakery, a fast-food eatery and an upscale restaurant—stands in stark contrast to its dismal surroundings in a beleaguered South Side neighborhood.

What's more, Farrakhan's eloquent remarks at the opening seemed tailored to fit the country's conservative zeitgeist. "We must stop depending on others to do for us what we could, what we should, and what we must do for ourselves," he said. The Salaam complex, Farrakhan added, is "a blueprint for economic development and investment in our neglected communities."

This kind of rhetoric coincides nicely with the tenets of Gingrich-style Republicans. In fact, the NOI's doctrine has always been closer to Republican conservatism than to the political liberalism embraced by traditional black leadership.

Of course, this emphasis on self-reliance has gained favor as the Republicans have gained power. The GOP's antipathy toward federally funded programs has changed the contours of the community development debate. With Republican hegemony stretching into the foreseeable future, many see the economic path of Farrakhan as the most promising direction for African-Americans.

His NOI is one of the few black groups left kicking in these gloomy days of the resurgent right. While organizations such as the NAACP and the National Urban League find themselves ideologically adrift and strategically inept, the NOI has intensified its black nationalist focus and is flourishing.

Historically, black nationalism thrives when America is in a xenophobic mood, and seldom has this country been in a meaner spirit. Referenda and legislation that harken back to pre-civil rights days are being proposed across the country. David Duke, the former Ku Klux Klansman and Louisiana gubernatorial candidate, correctly noted recently that the Republican Party has adopted his platform almost wholesale. Duke also speaks well of Farrakhan.

Were it not for Farrakhan's eugenic beliefs (which essentially are a reverse rendering of *The Bell Curve's* thesis on genetic determinism) and anti-Jewish preoccupations, the GOP could plausibly cast him as the perfect leader for African-Americans. Perhaps sensing that inclination, the ADL and the American Jewish Committee urged Rep. Peter King (R-NY) and Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole to critically examine the federal government's contracts with security firms owned by members of the NOI. The two legislators pushed for a March 2 congressional hearing to investigate charges that the firms discriminated in hiring and proselytized. among employees. Those companies hold contracts worth more than $10 million at public housing developments in Baltimore, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Dayton, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.

The one-day hearings proved to be a public relations bonanza for the NOI-connected firms. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Henry Cisneros investigated the charges lodged by King and Dole, and found them baseless. In fact, after interviewing 1,000 people in housing complexes where the firms work, Cisneros found "overwhelming support" for the unarmed guards.

Rather than discrediting the companies, the congressional focus on the NOI's crime-dampening and rehabilitative power displayed one of the group's most attractive features. That an unarmed group of bow-tied security guards could command more respect than fully armed police brigades is a telling indication of the NOI's ability to establish order.

That skill has been the key to the NOI's growth in popularity in increasingly unstable and impoverished inner-city communities. Impressed by that success, Farrakhan's allies have remained largely silent about his right-wing inclinations. Some even share his conspiratorial fascination with international finance; most are unaware, however, that such theories have their origins in white supremacist tracts. Many African-Americans, including those who don't necessarily support the NOI, frequently express anger at Jewish groups' "badgering" of Farrakhan. But the popular minister's open support of theories long associated with white groups on the racist right is a justifiable cause of alarm for Jews. Others should be similarly concerned. ◀

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MEXICO

Realidad check

The Mexican army displaces, loots and terrorizes a Chiapas village.

By **Steve Kretzmann**
LA REALIDAD, CHIAPAS

The column of Mexican armor kicks up a thick cloud of dust on its way through La Realidad (The Reality). The village, which only moments before had seemed the perfect picture of pastoral bliss, is silent now. As the tanks disappear into the jungle toward El Porvenir (The Future), people warily peer out of their homes.

"Each day they pass through here twice," explains a young woman. "Sometimes they stop, always they behave very aggressively. How can we believe they want peace when they point guns in our faces?"

La Realidad is deep in the Lacandon jungle, a six-hour, 80-kilometer journey from Las Margaritas, over dirt roads that are barely passable now and will become worse when the rains come. As in thousands of other communities in the jungle, and more in the northern highlands of Chiapas, people here have lived in constant fear since the military launched its campaign against the Zapatista rebels on February 9. As in virtually every other community in the area, the people here fled into the jungle as soon as the army attacked.

As of mid-March, some 20,000 people from other communities in the occupied zone—fully half the population—remained in hiding in the vast jungle that blankets the eastern portion of Chiapas, surviving on what they can forage and on the little aid that reaches them. Communities to which inhabitants have returned, such as La Realidad, Prado and La Sultana, are not much better off. The Mexican army, in its zeal, has ransacked whole villages, destroying supplies of water and food, slaughtering livestock, stealing deeds to the land and breaking farm implements.

In the first month of the occupation, San Cristóbal's Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Center for Human Rights along with CONPAZ, a coalition of peace and justice groups, have documented more than 60 cases of human rights violations—ranging from arbitrary detentions to summary executions. Perhaps hundreds of other cases remain unreported.

According to Interior Secretary Esteban Moctezuma, the army needs to remain in the jungle to "facilitate the return of residents living in the conflict zone who have been displaced." Returning residents may feel differently. In La Sultana, the 600 residents returned after a month in the mountains to find their village in ruins. They compiled the following partial list of destroyed and stolen items:

Two trucks, 85 millstones (for grinding corn), 170 files, 170 buckets, 170 machetes, 80 cases of soap, two tons of rice, 500 kilograms of beans, 20 sacks of sugar, 40 large packs of salt, 110 liters of cooking oil, 85 frying pans, 85 containers, 83 bottles of milk, 20 kilograms of rope, 10 new saddles, 509 chickens, 170 packs of batteries, 82 sacks of coffee, 170 pairs of socks, 80 pairs of shoes, 30 pairs of pants, 79 shawls, 85 tablespoons, 206 soup spoons, 603 glasses, three carts, 85 knives, two carpentry levels, 300 liters of gas and about 50,000 new pesos (about $10,000).

In a sharp riposte to this type of destruction, Zapatista spokesperson Subcommandante Marcos noted: "In Prado, the average family makes 200 pesos [about $40] per month. How much does the General earn for such a brilliant military action? Did they promote him for merit in the campaign?"

An army officer interviewed by a Greenpeace delegation in Prado denied that the military had destroyed anything and suggested that "animals" had ransacked the homes. Pablo Romo, executive secretary of the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Center, points out that this type of "plundering" has gone on in communities throughout the region and constitutes "massive and systematic" violations of human rights.

The army has accomplished its first objective—it has instilled fear in the population. Now, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) says it wants to talk. The major obsta-

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cle to reconciliation, as far as the rebels are concerned, is the continuing presence of the army. The sheer scale of the military presence makes it clear that this is a long-term occupation. Along the road to La Realidad, one passes through Guadalupe Tepeyac, which for most of last year was the Zapatista headquarters. Today, the village's shacks are dwarfed by dozens of armored personnel carriers, and hundreds of troops are its most conspicuous residents.

Solidaridad, a government social service agency set up by former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, has not been terribly effective at supplying relief. Solidaridad workers have reportedly withheld aid until they obtain information on local Zapatista sympathizers.

In early March, a Solidaridad truck carrying only four sacks of rice arrived in a community whose residents had recently returned. The bureaucrats approached the villagers and asked them what they needed.

"What do you mean what do we need?" asked a woman in response. "We need everything—your army destroyed everything we had."

The military itself has also been offering "help" to those communities it has destroyed. On March 12, 11 military trucks rolled into La Realidad. Over loudspeakers, the heavily armed soldiers announced that they had brought rice, beans and sugar for the people. A group of Tojolabale women bravely approached the soldiers and refused their aid. After a tense few minutes, during which the soldiers tried to tell the *indigenas* that the international observers—a doctor and a teacher—in La Realidad were there to "make trouble," the trucks returned to Guadalupe Tepeyac.

The impotence of Solidaridad and the arrogance of the military have further alienated the people of the Lacandon. After six weeks of military occupation, though, some aid appears to be reaching the communities that are still in hiding.

How is it getting there? What little aid is reaching the communities in the mountains is coming to them thanks to the well-organized network of community communication and participation that links all the Zapatista towns. With a smile that is visible even through his ski mask, a Zapatista explains that "the army is everywhere and feeds no one. We cannot be found and are trying to feed everyone."

Land use is at the heart of this struggle. After centuries of being pushed deeper into the jungle and farther up the mountains, these descendants of the Mayans simply have no place left to go. Although there is an abundance of fertile land in Chiapas, it is mostly controlled by ranchers producing cattle for export.

In late February, *campesinos* in Tila—a municipality in the northern highlands, bordering Tabasco—decided they had had enough. Sixty families, emboldened by the Zapatista cause and driven to desperate measures, reclaimed plots of land from the largest ranch, or *finca*, in the area. Although the land was only a small portion of the sprawling *finca*, it represented survival for these families.

When the municipal president, Jesus Celis Guillén, heard on March 4 of the action by the *campesinos*, he was enraged. According to several eyewitness accounts, he walked out of his office in City Hall armed with an army-style automatic weapon and opened fire on the first *campesino* he saw. Pascual Sanchez, a 25-year-old Ch'ol, died instantly after being shot at point-blank range. Guillen then reportedly walked back into his office and ordered the police to clean up the mess.

Several days later, the ranchers' private security goons, the "White Guards," struck at several of the *campesinos* tilling their reclaimed fields. Four men disappeared that day and have not been seen since. By March 8, the whole municipality was in an uproar. The mayor opted to flee in the company of his municipal police force. They have not returned, and on March 11, 5,000 people converged on Tila City Hall to celebrate the mayor's ousting.

The next day, Tila held its first free election ever. In a landslide, the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) won control of the local government. One by one, the nervous but proud winners of the elections strode onto the balcony overlooking the square, greeted by applause and cheering.

They had reason to be nervous. Four days before, in Bellavista, where the people had also taken over the government, the federal Judicial Police detained and tortured two of the newly elected councilmen. They have not been seen since. But in Tila, as of late March, all was still well.

While it is probably too early to predict the collapse of Mexico's "perfect dictatorship," the system is clearly under extreme duress. The PRI's credibility is at an all-time low in the wake of the Chiapas uprising, the economic crisis and the murder scandal involving the brother of former President Salinas.

"The problem with peace today is that we never know who is speaking for the Mexican government," explains Pablo Romo. "The decadence of the Mexican system goes very deep. When we hear something, it is impossible to know who is speaking—is it the businessman, the middleman, or the drugman, the Mafia? This is the greatest obstacle to a meaningful dialogue."

If President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León wants to salvage his term, he had better find a way to deal with the reality of Chiapas. The first step has to be the withdrawal of the Mexican army from the Lacandon. If Zedillo does not order that by early April, the Zapatistas will almost certainly not return to the negotiating table, and the war in Chiapas may flare up again.

"We don't want to kill any more than we want to die," said one Zapatista in late March. "It's as simple as that. We're hoping. We're working hard to find a political solution—extremely hard. We want to give the government a chance, to see if they'll deal with us this way. And then, if they don't, well, down the road we may have to go back to using arms. We cannot endure another 502 years. The reality is, if we're going to die, we would rather die struggling."◀

Steve Kretzmann is a freelance writer working in Central America.

Translation assistance for this article was provided by Tonya Hennessey and Jutta Meier Wiedenbach.

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IN THE ARTS

Son of Stalin

Burnt by the Sun *depicts the semi-sweet life of the dictator's favored citizens.*

By Pat Dowell

Nikita Mikhalkov's *Burnt by the Sun*, which won an Oscar last month for Best Foreign Language Film, takes place on a lovely summer day in 1936, a day that Soviet radio broadcasts announce is the "holiday of the construction of Stalin's airships and balloons." In the country, citizens' brigades are happily building scaffolding, as Young Pioneers learn Stalin's catechism and troops carry out their maneuvers.

This politically charged background comes more insistently to the fore as Mikhalkov's lyrical tragedy unfolds. The setting is a country house where a retired hero of the Bolshevik revolution, Col. Kotov, lives with his young wife and little girl, along with a coterie of aunts, uncles, grandparents and servants. Theirs is a comfortable family that has seen little of its privilege disturbed over 20 years of Soviet rule, thanks to Kotov's legendary status.

Director Mikhalkov plays the role of Kotov, a muscular soldier of middle age, white-haired with twinkling dark eyes. He is a charismatic man whose mere presence stops a group of tanks from destroying a field where the peasants are growing their wheat. The young tank officer is awed, and his commander is eager to bow to Kotov's beguiling but firm demand that they muck up some other piece of real estate with their maneuvers.

The film has an almost Chekhovian feel in its depiction of one family's fragile happiness. Into their blissful day in the country comes a guest from the past, foreshadowing a darkening future. Mitya, a family friend who was the first lover of Kotov's young wife Marrousia, returns unannounced to delight the old ladies and 6-year-old Nadia with his music and games. He dredges up old pains in Mar-



Burnt by the Sun
Directed by Nikita Mikhalkov

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rousia—and offers new ones to Kotov.

Mitya is with the political police, and his mission becomes obvious to Kotov (but no one else) as the afternoon wears on. He will take the colonel away, the latest victim of Stalin's purge.

Ironies abound. Kotov knows Mitya's purpose because he helped to recruit him years ago, when the young man was a banished fighter in the White armies during the civil war. Mitya's arrival represents the chickens coming home to roost with a vengeance.

In tone, *Burnt by the Sun* is very much like *Slave of Love*, Mikhalkov's beautiful 1980 film. That earlier movie was about a film troupe in the provinces in 1917, trying to complete a silly silent production even as history caught up to them, annihilating the delicate pleasures of people for whom politics is only a distant alarm. In *Burnt by the Sun* politics is much closer. The title refers to a popular love song that Nadia listens to on a gramophone, but also to the scorched earth of the Stalinist purges. On his desk, Kotov keeps a signed picture of himself and the omnipresent dictator.

Mikhalkov began his long career as an actor and has kept his hand in acting, even while building up an impressive body of work as a director. Most of the films in which he's appeared haven't been seen here, but he's stunning in *Burnt by the Sun*. Sporting a bushy mustache that gives a quizzical air to his smile, he is an unlikely combination of the comic and the heroic, a man of graceful physical gestures and unexpectedly broad humor.

Mikhalkov cast his own daughter, Nadia, as the colonel's little girl. She is a celestial imp of a child, and it wouldn't surprise me if her remarkable screen presence were the chief inspiration for the film. If you saw the televised Oscar ceremony, you know what I mean. Even there at the podium, she was radiantly at ease, and he hoisted her to his shoulder with one arm as he left the stage—a splendid gesture often seen in the film.

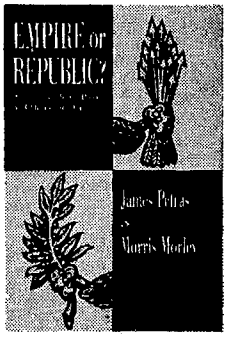
The autobiographical casting is a strong indication that the movie is Mikhalkov's way of saying that the life of privilege in the Soviet Union wasn't always as sweet as it looked. He himself was born into such a household; his father wrote the lyrics to the Soviet national anthem. But Mikhalkov's brother, Andrei Konchalovsky, another film director (*Siberiade*, *The Inner Circle*), has said their favor with Stalin was a precarious thing.

I imagine everyone in the former Soviet Union lately has searched anew in the family history for signs of displeasure from Stalin and his successors; such displeasure isn't hard to find. Russia has long been bedeviled with a politics that demands the unconditional surrender of dissenters not only in body but in spirit. Mitya warns Kotov of that, even as the colonel boasts of being able to clear things up with a call to Stalin's private phone number.

Yet with its final images, *Burnt by the Sun* indulges in the impulse to easy demonization that has long plagued Russian politics. As the car taking Kotov away stops because a disabled truck blocks the road, Mitya the professional betrayer watches an apparition materialize over "the people's wheat." A huge gray balloon, the product of this industrious holiday, lifts a banner bearing Stalin's portrait. With a bitter, almost mechanical gesture, Mitya salutes. And as the car speeds away, accompanied by the shocking sound of a sobbing Kotov, the unflappable hero convinced at last of his fate, the airborne face of Stalin looms overhead.

But "Stalin made me do it" seems too simple an answer for the destruction of Kotov. As the Bolsheviks swept away the old regime, and Stalin swept away all power but his own, so does even the post-Soviet new order seek to obliterate the old by focusing blame on a few evil men. We see the same thing in other countries, including our own. But political history is more complicated than that, as most of Mikhalkov's touching film makes painfully, exquisitely clear. ◀

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Truth or Derrida

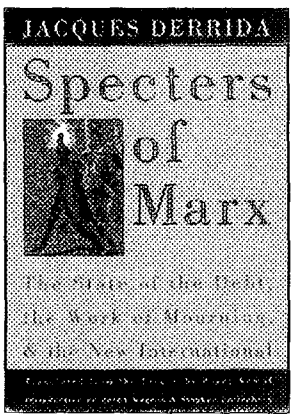
By Rick Perlstein

This year *The New Yorker* has welcomed a new character type into the smart-set pantheon: the cuddly radical. The new editor of *The Nation* is feted for her bodacious legs; the mourners of labor historian Philip Foner belt out "The Internationale" through their dentures; the old Old Leftist inhabitants of an upper-West Side Manhattan apartment building trade stories of May Days past as they shuffle around in bathrobes. But even as visionaries in the socialist grain are domesticated out of existence in tony magazines, specters of Marx stalk the earth—in places like southern Mexico, where the Zapatistas back their courageous last stand against a frightened Chase Manhattan with incisive theorizing that would make the master proud, and in places like Duke University, where the earnest Fredric Jameson engages in ponderous theorizing that would no doubt make the master a little more ambivalent. Communism is dead, but Marxism still haunts those who dream of a world more just. But their haunting is doubled, haunted again by the millions who died under Stalinist terror, and the millions more still who suffered the perversion of the Marxian utopian dream that finally crumbled in 1989.

Ghosts: these are the obsessions of critical thinkers now. Professors are brooding over the recent autobiography of the giant of Marxist philosophy, Louis Althusser, a madman cooped up in a mental hospital after strangling his wife; they are writing treatises on the "gothic Marxism" of Walter Benjamin, whose best work exists only in fragments; they are organizing conferences with apparitional titles like "Whither Marxism?" Jacques Derrida was the keynote speaker for the latter, and the transcript of those lectures is his latest book, *The Specters of Marx*, academia's most explicit critical engagement yet with the spooks of socialism. How, Derrida asks, can we struggle for justice when all the old rules fade to mist, the old canons of heroism are obscured in clouds of doubt, and radicals must hide behind ski masks in order to capture the world's fickle attention? But of course, with Derrida the questions are never so straightforward as that. For radicals in 1995, everything important seems shrouded, mysterious and—to use a favorite Derridean word—undecidable.

Ghosts are a natural concern for Derrida. Deconstruction, Derrida's infamously abstruse gift to the world of ideas, turns on the idea that it is only by cheating the spectral gap between present and past that meaning is produced at all. Language, for Derrida, works something like this: You are looking up an unknown word in a dictionary, perhaps a word you stumble across in *Specters of Marx*—say, "bifid." Only the definition you turn up for bifid contains another word you don't know. But upon looking *that* up, you're stumped by not knowing a word in *its* definition. And so on, and on. And yet, in order to speak—or write, or read—you cobble together a provisional definition out of all the traces the hunt leaves behind in your memory, smoothing over the always-present gaps in your knowledge—and forgetting about all the messiness. Derrida assumes that philosophy should be about exhuming those ghosts that everyday speech represses, in order to unsettle our complacent sense that we mean what we say and we say what we mean.

The connection between Derrida, deconstruction and Marx, however, is not so natural as the connection between Derrida, deconstruction and the discourse of ghosts. Derrida has never had much truck with the kind of professed political radicalism that inspired the crown princes of French philosophy who preceded him—Sartre, Barthes, Foucault—and in fact, deconstruction has been much criticized for foreclosing, in its emphasis on the impossibility of coherence, the possibility of progressive political action. But what with reports of Marx's death not all that greatly exaggerated, Derrida the ghost-hunter has declared himself, sort of, a Marxist.



Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International
By Jacques Derrida
Routledge
198 pp., $16.95

Of course, as every casual reader of Marx knows, ghosts are often Marx's question as well. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, history weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living; in the *Manifesto*, the specter of communism haunts Europe; in *Das Kapital*, tables

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are animated by the mysteries of exchange to turn somersaults. And this is not to mention the grand and terrifying theme of all of Marx's writings: capitalism as a monster that steals men's very souls. But Marx's ghosts are not Derrida's ghosts, and therein lies the problem with this book.



"GHOST BECKONS" BY JOSEPH SMITH

Like any mortal, I find Derrida difficult to read, but his prose is here perhaps more broachable than in any other of his works I've seen, and some of the more deconstructive passages have a kind of lyric beauty that can be read almost like poetry. Derrida's point of entry is, fascinatingly, the opening scene of *Hamlet*, where Hamlet confronts the spirit of his father. It's an overture, and it works beautifully: By speculating on the ways the dead can speak to us, Derrida illuminates the awesome ambiguity of any inheritance from the past, and you go into the rest of the test wide open to the possibility that Marx might make sense for 1995 in ways we hadn't thought of before.

But as Derrida moves along in his lecture, he is stymied by being, well, Derrida. He is so taken with the play of metaphors in Marx that he begins to use them only as props for his flights of invention. But when he stops being Derrida for a minute to give hard-headed political analysis, he makes banal points any not-yet-tenured radical could roll off the tip of his or her tongue (like, people are starving out there, folks). And what's more, Derrida's riffs on Marx's most figurative passages do little to unsettle Marx, who is more unsettling than Derrida any day. We should, for example, cite Marx's parable of the walking table. A worker fashions a table out of wood, and thus transforms it into something more than mere wood. "Yet for all that," Marx goes on, "the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood. But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than 'table-turning' ever was."

"Table-turning" is a pun, both on the worker's lathe, which transmutes mere wood into something with exchange value, and on the German phrase for a séance, a calling forth of ghosts. The point being, that any commodity in the act of exchange makes the human labor that goes into the making of it invisible, irrelevant, ghosted. So human connectedness is thwarted by the seemingly autonomous intercourse of things. Now Derrida spends a considerable amount of pages turning over this passage for us, trying to work his verbal magic to jar us into seeing the uncanniness of Marx's interest in the uncanny. As if he had to. For you can't outfreak the freak, Jacques.

And if you're going to freak, you'd better have a better reason than just messing with our minds. Derrida seems too interested in how Marx, the writer, plays with ink; Marx is interested in how the capitalist plays with blood. We return, again, to the infamous table. What Marx wanted to show through it was that behind every circuit of exchange, there are bodies. Real, live ones, not just dead ones: people sweating, struggling, shedding blood, laboring alienated labors that are rendered invisible by the logic of capital. By showing the ghosts, Marx wanted, paradoxically, to make these lives, then cooped up in Manchester factories, more visible. That is a lesson as valuable, deconstruction or no, after 1989 as it was in the 1850s. Nowadays, it means that we in the First World must realize that we can only be postindustrial—or philosophy professors—because they in the Third World are industrial, their labor anonymously feeding our ghostly circuits of exchange.

Like those peasants in the jungles of Chiapas. And oh, by the way, the Mexican government recently unmasked the identity of that shrouded revolutionary, Subcomandante Marcos. Turns out he's ex-philosophy professor Rafael Guillén. Wrote his senior thesis on Althusser. The truth is stranger than anything dreamed up in Derrida's philosophy. ◀

Rick Perlstein is staff writer at *Linguafranca*.

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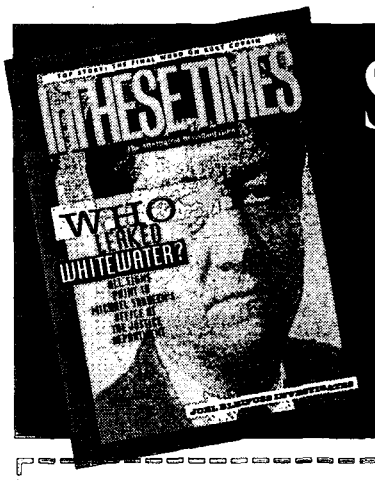
organization ("Should I develop my 'killer abs' or build my 'self-esteem' when I get home from work?") and vast, expensive infrastructure (just open *Men's Health* or take a trip to Nike Town to see the commodification of athleticism). The rhetoric of self-abnegation can be misleading: On one page *Vitality* accuses Americans of "wasting 30 percent of their discretionary income," but then, a few pages on in their "Vitality Shopper," woos them with electronic air purifiers and exercise machines.

Behind the veil of *Vitality*'s "life enhancing" philosophy is an implicit embrace of fraudulence: To be successful, the magazine counsels, one must present a simulated self. An excerpt taken from *Selling* magazine advises readers to build long-term relationships with customers "by helping them solve their problems and resisting the temptation to confide your own." It's straight out of David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, which spoke of "modes of manipulating the self in order to manipulate others," and one wonders if that behavior should be applied in the home as well as the workplace. After all, wasn't that the ineluctable appeal of the '50s "Organization Man" fathers on television—the managerial grace with which they worked out their children's and wives' problems, never revealing what anxiety might lie beneath their own calm demeanor? Now business values are heralded at feverish new pitches in the marketplace as the no-nonsense, nonpartisan solutions to domestic disorders: A new book, *Every Family Needs a CEO*, has been praised by both liberals and the Christian Right.

Beyond its immediate agenda of holistic personal and corporate health, *Vitality* aims to endow its readers with the table manners of the professional middle class, at one point earnestly advising employees to "never outdrink others at office parties." The magazine's hollow message of happy-think echoes the bizarre philosophy of surrender that another early success manual, *The Joy of Service*, propounded: "If you want to get the most out of life, just make up your mind that you were made to be happy, that you are a happiness-machine, as well as a work-machine." Potentially thorny issues are neutered with a banal shot of quotidian common sense. "If your boss is fired," one of *Vitality*'s quick-on-the-uptake columns advises, "analyze the events that led to the dismissal so you can avoid making the same mistakes."

In its prescriptions for corporate wellness, *Vitality* erroneously presumes a corporate fealty that, in an age of permanent temp workers and outsourcing, is increasingly obsolete. What becomes of the corporate Leviathan in Peter Drucker's "Network Society," where people work *for* organizations, but not *as parts of* them? The recent Barings Bank debacle shows that, for all its preventive care measures, the corporate Leviathan is hardly immune to illness. Likewise, *Vitality*'s fastidious regime of personal conditioning will do little to console a workforce trapped in the belly of the beast. ◀

Tom Vanderbilt toils happily for a Canadian media conglomerate and is a contributing editor of *The Baffler*.



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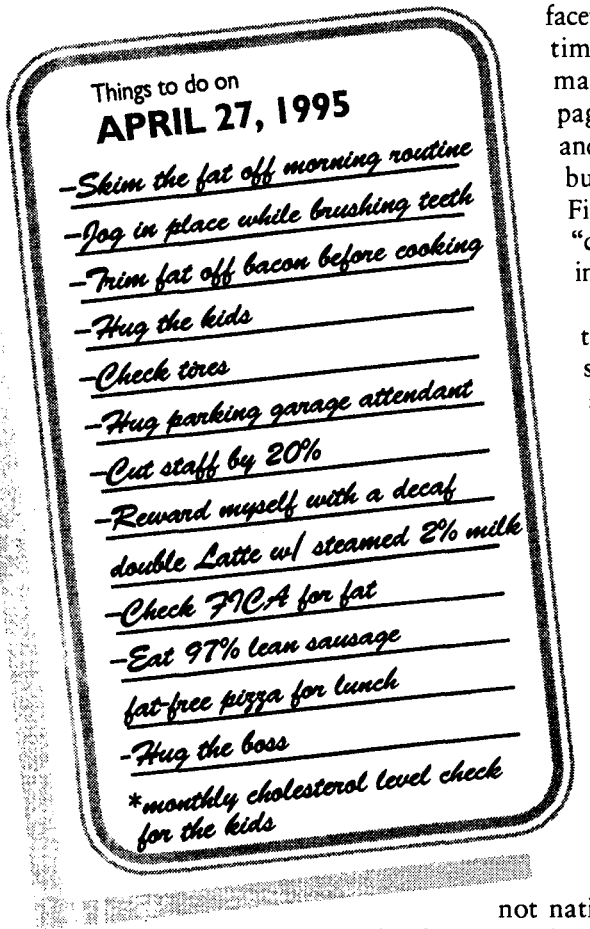
By Tom Vanderbilt

Although physical health has long been touted as the path to monetary success, it was the Victorians who so thoroughly tied individual health to national well-being. But the Victorian virtues of maintenance and moderation couldn't survive the turn-of-the-century emergence of mass consumer capitalism unscathed. Increasingly, health became less a function of abnegation than of indulgence: to consume more was to experience more of "real life."

Evangelization of the healthy life was quickly taken up by advertisers, success gurus, religious figures and businessmen, who took to the road to deliver what at heart seems to be a contradictory agenda—to inflame consuming passions, on one hand, and to extol the sobriety of business rationality on the other. To reconcile Protestantism's stern pragmatism with the new concupiscence of commodified desire, post-religious sects, such as the devotees of "mind cure," turned their attention to "the sunlight of health."

Nearly a century later, in a virtually unchanged form, the therapeutic ethos is still going strong in corporate America, exemplified by *Vitality*, a magazine whose very title is redolent of mind cure pablum at its best. One of those glossy and colorful magazines that gets unceremoniously dumped in thousands of corporate mailboxes every month, *Vitality* dangles bold new "life enhancing" advice and "good news about health, wealth and happiness" before its passive readership in much the same way that charlatan Annie Payson Call promised "power through repose" a century ago. Filled with scores of handy tips that range from tax-saving advice to exercise regimens to the proper way of preparing eggs, *Vitality* is a bizarre cross-fertilization of *Hints from Heloise* and *Fortune*, a nagging and insipid checklist of all the things physical and fiscal you can do to help yourself and, more importantly, *your corporation*. Indeed, "corporate wellness"—the magazine's peculiar obsession—refers not to the health of corporate entities per se but to the disposition of people who work for them. Picture a new version of Hobbes' Leviathan, with each employee making up a small part of the King's—I mean the CEO's—body. In a twist on the Victorians, *Vitality* hints that your health is essential to corporate health, and down the Fortune 500 halls does the successful corporate Leviathan march, the sound of a thousand Stairmasters stepping in unison!

But unlike Hobbes' version, *Vitality*'s Leviathan is weight-conscious: only through rigorous "downsizing" can it be made "lean and mean." Everywhere in the March "Slim and Trim Issue," the magazine wrings every metaphor it can out of fat, that great scourge our civil society can't seem to live without. Personal finance, time-management, diet: every facet of life, *Vitality* tells us, must do time at the fat farm. Much as the magazine's "Supermarket Safari" pages warn of fatty salad dressing and counsel readers to "set up a fat budget" in their diets, the "Your Finances" column tells readers to "check for FICA fat" on withholding statements.



Vitality may seem to speak for the side of corporate culture steeped in Puritan restraint and self-denial, but it is a peculiarly "abundant" sense of denial. The flipside of the IMF-style austerity measures to which healthy Americans are encouraged to submit is a Keynesian logic of lavish spending—spending intended, one suspects, to prime the pump of the whole health and fitness industry. Indeed, health, personal success and self-fulfillment—like GDP growth and consumer confidence—have become rigorously quantifiable goals, the object of corporate, if not national, planning. These erstwhile "goods of the soul" have been interpolated into a corporate structure, with budgets and deadlines, with Taylorist

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